casual ✹ connect

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The Game Job Site - For Everybody

Letter from the Director

I think everyone would like to say they predicted the casual movement, but let's be honest: While the rest of us were making first-person-shooters for consoles, Trip Hawkins was the lone voice in the wilderness, the wild-eyed prophet of casual games. He was ranting about cell phones and China and whatnot while the rest of us were fixated on making games that were bigger, badder, and significantly more bodacious.

I guess the good news is that eventually we started to listen.

Now it is hard to miss the casual phenomenon. GREE has over 140 million users, for crying out loud. Tencent has become an over-the-top success—practically overnight, it seems. And then there's Zynga, which seemingly went from startup to IPO in a matter of months. We hear Ubisoft predicting that their casual business will soon be larger than their enthusiast business, and even EA is investing more in casual than in core. *EA!*

While I have been writing this letter for years, telling everyone casual was the wave of the future, I never expected—not even for one moment—that the future would arrive so quickly. But with the benefit of hindsight, it really shouldn't be that surprising. Casual gaming remains so open and accessible that innovators can try new things with (relatively) little risk—and substantial potential reward. Our industry abounds with companies that have stuck with their dreams through thick and thin and made great success stories of themselves. And there are many examples of companies which have shifted with the market—while continuing to be strong leaders in the casual games space.

Can you see why I love my job?

And admit it: You do too. Although we may not have foreseen this success the way Trip did, eventually we all got religion. Because the truth is that it's great to work in casual games—and it will remain that way for years to come.

Amen, brother! We believe!

Jessica Tams, *Director of the Casual Games Association*
jessica@casualconnect.org

EVENT CALENDAR

7-9 February 2012	Casual Connect Europe

Congress Center Hamburg
Marseiller Straße 1
Hamburg, 20355
Germany

May 2012	Casual Connect Asia

Considered the gateway between East and the West for centuries, Singapore, located in the heart of fascinating Southeast Asia, continues to embrace both tradition and modernization today.

24 - 26 July 2012	Casual Connect Seattle

Benaroya Hall
200 University St.
Seattle, WA 98101

October 2012	Casual Connect Kyiv

Kyiv, in Ukraine, is a modern historical city located between Eastern and Western Europe. Eastern Europe is known for excellent school systems that emphasize math and sciences, while fostering creative thinking. Tetris and about 30% of the Top 10 Games in 2010, were partially developed in Eastern Europe.

Contributors

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Jill is the Director of Business Development for MindJolt Games, focusing primarily on the licensing and production of games for MindJolt's social properties. Previously, she headed up domestic business development and international sales for traditional board game company, Imagination Games.
San Francisco, CA

Nathan Sherrets
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Nathan attended Full Sail University through their Online Bachelor of Game Design program. Nathan currently works as a full-time game designer with Phantom EFX and is an author and marketing director for a company he started with some friends writing third-party source material for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.
Cedar Falls, IA

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Bryan is a game designer at Phantom EFX. He is the lead designer on *Battle Slots*, and many other projects at Phantom EFX. He has an accounting degree, which has helped immensely in his daily work designing games (not).
Cedar Falls, IA

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Before co-founding Smart Bomb in 2003, Clark was the President and CEO of Cobalt Interactive, a pioneering studio in interactive marketing and advergaming whose clients included St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Quaker Oats.
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Matt is senior vice president of Game-House, overseeing global operations for RealNetworks' digital games business. Mr. Hulett joined Real as Chief Revenue Officer for the games division in 2009 and assumed the top post of the division in July, 2010.
Seattle, WA

Frima
Quebec, Canada

PopCap Games
Seattle, WA

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Konrad is Business Development Director at Mediastay and as such deals with the overall business development strategy of the Games Passport. Prior to entering the fun world of gaming, Konrad worked as a business developer for various industries in Poland, Austria and Spain.
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Per Besson
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Per works in Business Development for Happy Elements. After working for years in Marketing/ Business Development around South America and Europe, he has come out East to join the Asia growth story. Now that the company is solidifying its position in Asian markets, Per is helping to leverage its games across Western markets.
Beijing, China

Mike Sego
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Mike is the CEO of Gaia Interactive, owner of social gaming community Gaia Online. He previously served as the Chief Product Officer for Gaia. Prior to Gaia, Mike was the creator and sole developer of the popular *(fluff) Friends* application for Facebook.
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Projjol is Director of Marketing at SponsorPay. Previously, he worked in London as VP Marketing for mobile payments company Surfpin. He earned an MBA from the Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford as well as degrees in computer science and informatics from DePauw University and Indiana University, respectively.
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Valeriya Mallayeva
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Valeriya is the Managing Director of the Flash GAMM! Conference, that is held under the patronage of Absolutist and attracts more and more developers and publishers of Flash, social and mobile games year after year. In addition, Valeriya is a co-manager of Ukrainian Adobe Flash Platform user Group.
Ukraine

Denis Konovalov

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Denis celebrated 10 years of game development earlier this year. He started his career at Fireglow, where he took part in developing the *Sudden Strike* series, as well as a game called *Stranger*. He worked his way up the ladder from programmer to project director.

St.Petersburg, Russia

wooga
Berlin, Germany

Ekaterina Zholobova

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Kate joined Nevosoft in March, 2011 and works as head of the mobile application promotion department. Altogether Kate has more than 1.5 years of experience in the mobile apps industry. She has a Master's degree in Marketing and a Bachelor's degree in Economics. Kate's responsibilities include preparing the company's games for release on the App Store and promoting them.

St.Petersburg, Russia

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Regina is Marketing Manager at SponsorPay, an award-winning start-up that provides an innovative offer-based payments solution for digital content. She holds a diploma in Journalism from University of Leipzig. Before joining SponsorPay, she gained experience by writing for print and online media as well as for Berlin-based startups.

Berlin, Germany

Remi Lavertu

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Remi wasn't able to become an evil tyrant so he graduated as a multimedia integrator in 2007. Since then, he has been working for a year as a Flash developer at Frima Studio and is now active as a web (app) designer at Taleo and community manager/social networking specialist/q&a at Berzerk Studio.

Quebec, Canada

Elya Sikerin

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When Elya was eight years old, he started to write simple games (using Basic) while dreaming of making games for a living. After receiving his degree and spending a decade or so in other pursuits, in 2007 he decided to make his childhood dream come true and started developing casual and Flash games.

Ukraine

Thomas Martin

Thomas B. Martin has worked as a graphic designer at Frima Studio since 2008. He has worked on most of Frima's intellectual properties, including *Zombie Tycoon, Young Thor,* and *A Space Shooter for Free!*, as well as the upcoming *Nun Attack*. The cover's colors are by Joëlle Comtois, another one of Frima Studio's extremely talented artists.

Says Martin: "We brainstormed for less than two minutes before getting this idea for the cover. I felt like we should include a sweater vest—they're so casual these days. We also wanted to feature zombies from *Zombie Tycoon*. We thought golf offered the perfect setting to feature both a sweater vest and a zombie. When one of my colleagues suggested the zombie use his own eye to play, we all fell down laughing."

New & Notable

Remi Lavertu,
Berzerk Studio;
Quebec, Canada

Welcome to Berzerk Land

A Tale of Epic Gaming Thunderness

It has been three years since Berzerk Studio was born; three years since the release of *Mechanical Commando*, the first of 12 games born under the berserker's helmet—and we can tell you that we are still just warming up. We have grown from three founding members in 2008 to seven, and we have many ongoing projects with tons of ideas for the centuries to come. While we might have called ourselves "Megathor Galactron" and do our little thing, showing violent games to some friends and maybe our aunts during a cousin's wedding, this pure and innocent project between friends somehow became our bread and butter, and a way of life to which we are very dedicated. We are extremely proud to see that people from around the world now enjoy our games as much as, or even more than, we do!

Making Classic Games Our Own Way

Even though we usually release browser-based, Flash-driven games on various websites and portals, our bestseller remains the single one that we've released on iPhone/iTouch, the fan-favorite *Berzerk Ball*. While we were aware of the growing mobile market, we didn't expect our geek-smashing game to perform so well on the Apple Store! For the past few years, we've explored many different paths, learning from our experiences while always keeping close to retro gaming paradigms. Since the release of *Mechanical Commando*, we have challenged ourselves a lot from a developer's perspective. While we've made and will keep making games like *Hero's Arms* and *Swordless Ninja*—games that share obvious characteristics with legendary games that you may know—we still want to explore new ways of playing, like we did with *Trap Master* and *Alienocalypse*.

Berzerk Ball might be the game that best describes us because of its crazy, over-the-top concept. (It shows what kind of ideas go through our heads every day.) Following the success of *Homerun in Berzerk Land*, we've brought this model to another level, and the gaming community's reaction has been very positive. We do not pretend nor want to reinvent the wheel; what we want is to catch the feeling that we've had and still have while playing classic games and package that feeling in a way we see fit.

From what we've seen, the old-school gaming community is very strong, and we feel like we're part of a movement, a generation perhaps, that embraces nostalgia. In the end, it's all about making a game we ourselves like to play, and we happen to love old school a lot. We are inspired by robots, aliens, dinosaurs, '80s action movies, warriors, weapons that hurt, corpses, fire, and explosions—and we are not ashamed of it. To those who understand, we salute you. As for the others, you'll probably never get it.

Being Berserk

Today, Berzerk Studio is not only about the games. It's also about the brand. In the beginning, it was important for us to find a catchy name supported by a kick-ass logo. We want-

ed something that would define us as gamers who love brutal, bad-ass stuff, but that was about it. As time went by, we released many games that had different game-play and visuals. Even with the *Berzerk Mini* titles, which target younger gamers, we came to realize that our games all share a very abstract "Berzerk feel." At some point, the Berzerk identity became so strong that some guy at a convention even told us he expected us to be pumped-up barbarians, wearing only the pelts of wild animals and brandishing battle axes. It is funny, flattering—and not so far from reality. This is exactly what we want people to think when they see the Berzerk logo.

For us, this all came very naturally because we always try to put a part of our own personalities in our games. The biggest mistake you can make when building an indie franchise is to try to show the world something you are not. Others have spent a lot of energy getting

Alienocalypse

Hero's Arms

into other people's heads, trying to discover the winning combination, developing for the masses. But when we wake up every morning and go to work, we have passion, motivation,

and fun, and we put all that into our games. We don't make games for specific types of players; rather we make games for ourselves and for people like us. We've been asked, "How do you guys attract so many people to your Facebook page!?" To which we respond something like, "We don't know; it just happened." There isn't much more we can say about that; it's just about staying true to yourself.

A Growing Arsenal

Now that the mobile market is playing a larger role in the gaming industry, we can't and won't let this opportunity pass us by. Considering the incredible popularity of *Berzerk Ball*, how could we? Even though browser-based games developed with Flash are what we know best, we won't let something as trivial as technology hold our games back. We are currently working with Unity and are confident that we'll be able to deliver our games on various platforms quite easily in the near future. It still doesn't cover every possibility, but we have serious projects for mobile and console development already underway. In the next few years, you'll see our logo on a growing number of devices.

At the same time, we intend for our games to spread to other markets as well. As vast as the Internet may be, word spreads incredibly quickly, and we find it very important to master the possibilities that are available to us. We've got great opportunities to get feedback from our fans and also to build personal and professional relationships with fellow devel-

opers, and we want to push that even further in the near future. It is important to keep an open mind when it comes to social networking and global communications. We are indeed limited to French, English and some Spanish for direct contact (we release our games mostly in English) but all of our games are available for translation. Some of them are now available in Chinese, Japanese and even Arabic! The limitations we once had related to geography and language have all but disappeared.

Paid to Do What We Like

Years ago, when our founders walked away from what might be called a "big company," they were determined to build a team that was both united and friendly. Sure, there is a job to be done, but working at Berzerk basically means working with friends. There is no better way to work than with fervor and happiness. Still, we work with deadlines and a rigid project management process because we all know that if we don't deliver, we don't eat. This is why we developed custom tools, like the Lachhh Engine and why we're willing and able to make a complete game in only two weeks! Inasmuch as we all get paid to do what we like to do, doing it in a professional way is the least we can do.

Being an independent game studio basically means that we are masters of our destiny. It takes guts and leadership to leave the shadow of the successful businessman and to live by the *pixilated* sword in this merciless

Berzerk Studio

world, but we are living proof that it can be done. We knew how to make games but a business requires that you somehow sell your products, and that is something we've had to develop (after all the basic paper filing and accounting). It all comes to getting the tools you need to go forward and surrounding yourself with those who will help you reach your goals. There is no magic recipe—and no doubt there is a bit of luck involved—but you've got to jump in or you'll never find out.

Looking at the success of retro-style gaming these days, we are glad this is where we come from. From the beginning, we've focused on mostly retro game-play and general game design since it is simple, effective and known by pretty much every gamer nowadays. We don't feel any limitations or obligations, but it remains clear that retro gaming is and will forever be a big influence. With the expanding use of touch screens and motion capture, it would be an error for us to limit ourselves in any way as we move forward. We are not bound to any technical approach so long as when you play one of our games you know it's from Berzerk!

We do not pretend nor want to reinvent the wheel; what we want is to catch the feeling that we've had and still have while playing classic games and package that feeling in a way we see fit.

Committed to "Awesome"

It is now common knowledge that most companies use data about their consumers to focus on certain recurring aspects of their habits and then develop products that should be appealing to them. We don't do that sort of product development. It might be appealing for many to gather data and to build a product that they know will sell, but we firmly believe

Berzerk Ball
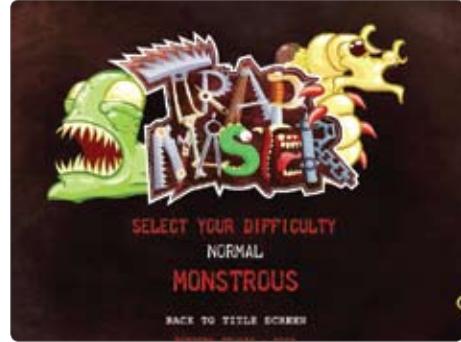
Trap Master

that if we love our games, others will too. What we do, though, is read comments and reviews. We are very aware, JCVD-style, of the community. No constructive comment will go unnoticed. We're always looking ahead to improve our games.

Every new project comes from a basic idea that we define as "awesome." Usually, Étienne and Marc come with an idea so we can all brainstorm over it. We mentioned the importance of our brand earlier, so we try to keep as close to the Berzerk vibe as possible while remaining open-minded—like we did with *Swordless Ninja*. We create what we like, and what we like is what Berzerk is all about, so it all comes together very instinctively. When the game's concept is defined, we write a project plan and stick to it, keeping the production's budget very tight. If new ideas come up during development, we define their cost and whether or not they bring something to the game. It we decide it is worth it, we revisit our plan; and if not, we just keep the idea for another game or maybe a sequel. This discipline helps to keep the game on track and to keep the focus on simplicity and addictive gameplay. Less is more! The earlier the game is

released, the earlier you can get feedback, get new ideas and get other projects going.

During the past months, we've been working very hard on a huge project that will help us build a strong community and a centralized fan-base. We can't share much more detail than that right now, but as you'll soon see, it is gigantic, awesome and completely *Berzerkworthy*. We are very excited to bring this project to fruition, as it will benefit both our fans and ourselves—not only as a powerful showcase to our games, but also as a way for us to work on bigger projects.

Until then, we'll just keep spreading our games on both Flash and mobile platforms. From this day forward, our prime objective is to promote our brand while encouraging gamers to connect with it. We want gamers to be part of our success, to come together in what might be called a "Berzerk Horde"— a group of people being awesome together. It is that strong "Berzerk feeling," kept alive by the positive reactions of devoted fans and casual gamers alike, that fuels the Berzerk machine, giving us the will to work our asses off every day so we can unleash mighty games forevermore. ❊

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by TRANSGAMING

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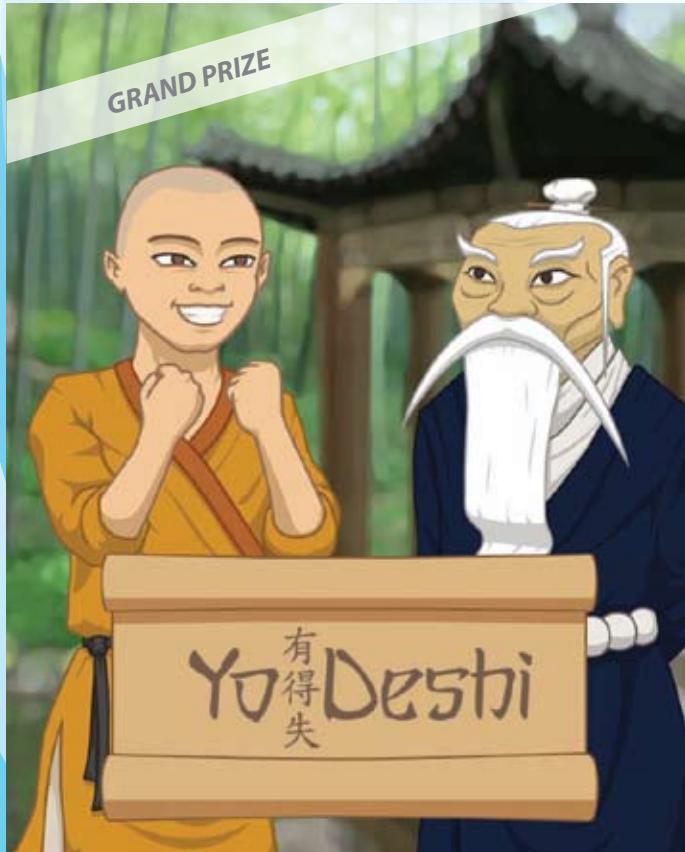
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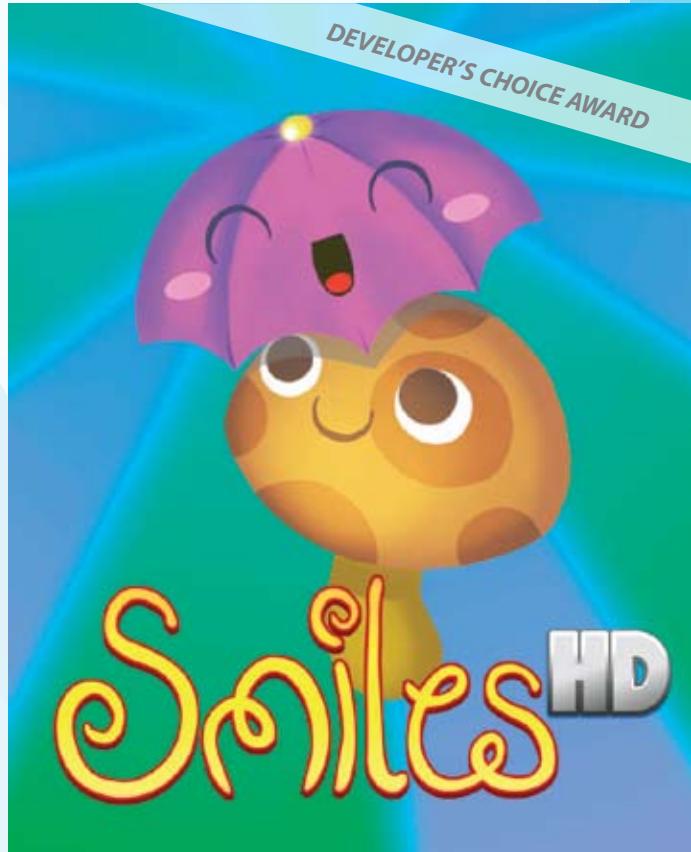
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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF
TRANSGAMING'S GAMETREE DEVELOPER COMPETITION

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

The Making of *Snoopy Flying Ace*

We originally conceived *Snoopy Flying Ace* as an epic, cross-platform, action-adventure game starring Snoopy and Woodstock from the Peanuts comic strip. Development actually proceeded down this path for several months, leaving Smart Bomb with a surfeit of really cool art assets for set pieces that were never created. For example, we planned to use Orca Bomb as the centerpiece weapon for a series of missions involving a variety of different ships and subs. Ultimately, we pared the game down to a focused multiplayer shooter for XBLA. We also used a couple of the ships in the arenas for the XBLA game as static parts of the environment.

Smart Bomb Interactive

On the left, a style guide image informed the artwork for many of the mission levels that would take place in enemy territory.

On the right, a screen capture from the playable demo we built of this level, demonstrating how valuable it is to have level landmarks thoroughly visualized before production.

This is one of the images we used to anchor the style guide for the original, larger game design. Created by our studio art director, Rodney Olmos, it encapsulated what we wanted Snoopy's "home base" to feel like.

The Making of *Snoopy Flying Ace*
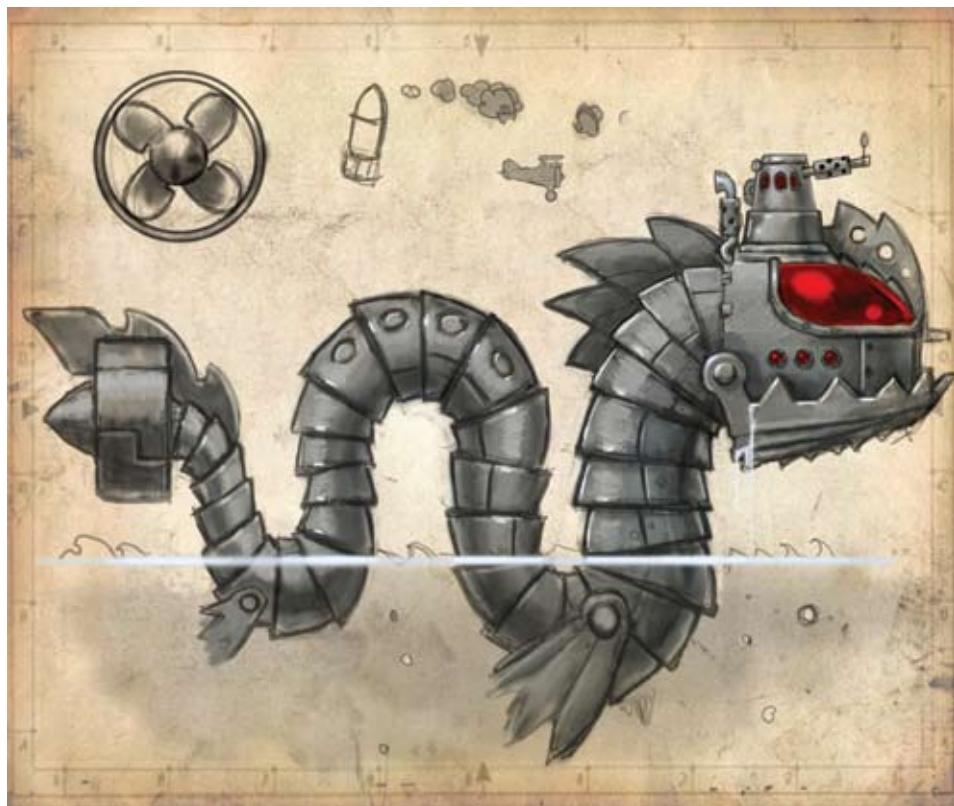
Originally conceived as a boss sequence for Snoopy and Woodstock's adventure, the Sea Snake evolved into an environmental hazard in one of the XBLA game's multiplayer arenas.
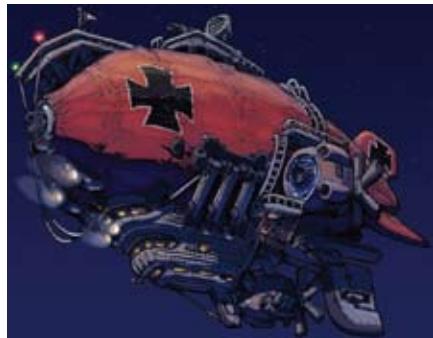
Zeppelins played a big part in the original game design. Not only did the player battle them in planes, on-foot game-play occurred in, around, and on top of the behemoths.

In many ways, airplanes are the stars of the *Snoopy Flying Ace* XBLA title; the Peanuts characters are the supporting cast.

Animation tests showed Smart Bomb how much potential these characters had to star in a 3D game. Unlike many 2D cartoon characters that just look weird when they're dragged into three dimensions, Snoopy and Woodstock seem as though they were born to be CGI stars.

ART CREDITS:

Rodney Olmos, Dave Laub, Peter Wagner, Paul Boyle, Hyun Dong Kim, Nick Edwards, Ed Britton, Christopher Wright, Andrew Hernandez, Tyler Stott, Jack Martin, Chris Hawkes, Nathan Riddle, Mac McCann, Pat Carver, Taylor Maw, Toph Gorham

By the Numbers

The Rise of the European App Economy

After being held back for years by a fragmented carrier and platform landscape, Europe is finally picking up speed when it comes to smartphone penetration, app usage and revenues. Downloads of apps for iPad, iPhone, and Android have all seen massive increases between January and July of 2011, with Android and iPad apps, in particular, doubling in volume in many countries.

Together, the strongest countries and platforms in Europe now make up an app economy of more than 500 million downloads per month (iOS and Android)—roughly two-thirds the size of the US market—and there is no end in sight for this amazing growth.

The Majority of Apps Are Free
Apple introduced in-app purchases in the fall of 2009; Android followed in the spring of 2011. The in-app purchase model has opened up a number of monetization options and combinations for developers:

> Free apps monetized by in-app purchases (freemium) and/or in-app advertising (display or performance ads)
> Paid apps without in-app purchases, where revenue is generated only by the initial price charged for the download
> Paid apps that further monetize with in-app purchases (such as buying additional levels, for example)

According to research by analytics firm Distimo, the average price for the most popular iPhone games has dropped by 28 percent in the last year, and is now as low as $1.44, (or £1). Consequently, developers who rely purely on the paid app model need to sell a large number of apps to make decent revenues.

At the same time, Distimo reveals that the freemium model has helped the top 200 iPhone game developers increase their total revenue by 79 percent YoY. The popularity of this model stems, in large part, from its flexibility: Without a payment barrier, bigger audiences can be targeted and then monetized with sales of virtual items. Thus, the value of an app's content is not determined once (and for all users alike), but stays flexible depending on what each user is willing to spend—or rather invest. In contrast to paid-only apps, freemium apps can monetize multiple times, since many popular virtual items are not durable but consumable. The downside is this: Similar to social games in the desktop space, only a small percentage of freemium app or game users (three percent, on average) spend money for in-app items.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the European app economy and monetization models in mobile games with the help of data provided by Xyologic.

A Closer Look at the UK
The UK is Europe's single largest market and the numbers are quite exemplary, so it's worthwhile to break them down for the iPhone as the single-most established platform and app economy.

Of the nearly 100 million iPhone apps downloaded in the UK in the analyzed month (July 8 to Aug 8, 2011), 78 million were free apps, of which 34.2 percent (26.8 million) had in-app purchases. Of the 20.9 million paid app downloads, 17.8 percent (3.7 million) featured in-app purchases.

Games were the overwhelmingly dominant app type and accounted for 65.8 percent of downloads for the 150 free apps, followed by entertainment apps well behind with 8.0 percent and social networking with 7.7 percent. For the top 150 paid apps, games led with 61.1 percent, followed by utilities (14.6 percent) and entertainment apps (5.0 percent).

iPhone In-app Purchase Economy
Prices for in-app purchases within free apps during the period sampled ranged from $0.79 to up to £230.12, with $2.50 being the average price for the most popular items. For paid apps with in-app purchases, prices ranged from $0.79 to as high as £373.96, with the average price for most popular items a little higher at £3.11. As expected, games were the most popular app category comprising 43.8 percent of downloads of the in-free-app purchases category and 45.6 percent of the in-paid-app purchases.

The average price of in-app items most often purchased by users also depended on the category of games. For paid apps, the game categories performing above the average price for in-app items were role-playing, board games, simulation and adventure; for free apps, simulation, role-playing, adventure and strategy. Average in-app item prices for free games ($1.97) were higher than that for paid games ($1.59) in the top ten game categories.

Android In-app Purchase Economy
For Android, the in-app purchase model is still developing. Of the top 150 free apps in the UK Android market (July 08-August 08,

by Regina Leuwer
& Projjol Banerjea,
SponsorPay; **Berlin, Germany**

TABLE 1.
App downloads in Europe and US.
Android, iPhone, iPad
(in millions)

	Platform	January 2011	July 2011	Growth, %
Germany	Android	17.5	34.2	95.43%
	iPhone	47	61.2	30.21%
	iPad	5.5	13.0	136.36%
Spain	Android	6.5	18.1	178.46%
	iPhone	18.1	23.6	30.39%
	iPad	2.6	4.7	80.77%
France	Android	15.4	25.7	66.88%
	iPhone	48.5	66.4	36.91%
	iPad	5.5	10.7	94.55%
Great Britain	Android	27.2	50.4	85.29%
	iPhone	80.9	99.4	22.87%
	iPad	8.2	16.1	96.34%
Italy	Android	7.5	13.9	85.33%
	iPhone	25.2	36.2	43.65%
	iPad	3.7	7.8	110.81%
Netherlands	Android	4.9	10.9	122.45%
	iPhone	17	23	35.29%
	iPad	3.5	7.8	122.86%
Russia	Android	12.1	18.2	50.41%
	iPhone	24.7	26.9	8.91%
	iPad	3.8	8.1	113.16%
USA	Android	165.6	308.8	86.47%
	iPhone	282.1	385.2	36.55%
	iPad	36.4	68.4	87.91%

XYOLOGIC

All statistical data was kindly provided by Xyologic, an app search company with cutting edge technology that helps users find the best mobile apps.

With Xyologic Reports, each month the company shares some of the data which powers the app store search with the community: 150 reports covering four platforms and 16 countries—the most extensive view of the global app landscape. Learn about the top apps as well the latest most downloaded apps, the most important app publishers in each country and much more. To download the latest reports please visit www.xyologic.com/reports

The Rise of the European App Economy

Downloads of Games With In-App Purchases, iPhone Great Britain, 08.07 - 08.08.2011

Free

Game Subcategory	Game Downloads in Subcategory	Average Price of Most Sold In-App Purchase Item	Downloads in Subcategory as a % of All Game Downloads	Downloads of Games with In-App Purchase in Subcategory	Downloads of Games with In-App Purchase in Subcategory as a % of Game Downloads
Arcade	4,501,000	1.23 €	13.09%	2,133,000	47.39%
Simulation	3,751,000	3.32 €	10.91%	3,159,000	84.22%
Adventure	3,594,000	2.51 €	10.45%	2,558,000	71.17%
Puzzle	3,235,000	1.15 €	9.41%	1,372,000	42.41%
Action	2,464,000	1.47 €	7.16%	1,257,000	51.01%
Family	2,447,000	1.45 €	7.11%	1,320,000	53.94%
Sports	2,094,000	1.60 €	6.09%	503,000	24.02%
Role Playing	1,970,000	3.18 €	5.73%	1,731,000	87.87%
Strategy	1,703,000	2.41 €	4.95%	1,053,000	61.83%
Board	1,674,000	1.37 €	4.87%	648,000	38.71%

Paid

Action	2,182,700	1.18 €	23.40%	738,200	33.82%
Puzzle	1,133,700	1.08 €	12.15%	321,300	28.34%
Strategy	972,100	1.20 €	10.42%	215,400	22.16%
Family	708,200	1.12 €	7.59%	217,200	30.67%
Sports	705,900	1.04 €	7.57%	170,800	24.20%
Arcade	687,200	1.30 €	7.37	205,300	29.87%
Adventure	613,200	1.66 €	6.57%	174,600	28.47%
Role Playing	332,200	3.13 €	3.56%	204,600	61.59%
Simulation	265,600	1.73 €	2.85%	47,800	18.00%
Board	249,700	2.43 €	2.68%	41,800	16.74%

All statistical data was kindly provided by Xyologic, an app search company with cutting edge technology that helps users find the best mobile apps. With Xyologic Reports, each month the company shares some of the data which powers the app store search with the community: 150 reports covering four platforms and 16 countries—the most extensive view of the global app landscape. Learn about the top apps as well the latest most downloaded apps, the most important app publishers in each country and much more. To download the latest reports please visit www.xyologic.com/reports

XYOLOGIC

Top Downloaded Apps, iPhone Great Britain, 08.07 - 08.08.2011

Free

App Title	Publisher	App Type	Category	Monetization Type	Downloads This Month
Happy Park	Infinidy Corp	Games	Simulation (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	974,000
Facebook	Facebook	Apps	Social Networking	Free	620,000
Tiny Tower	NimbleBit	Games	Simulation (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	533,000
Hot Gems	A Radical Nut	Games	Arcade (Games)	Free	464,000
Racing Penguin Flying	Top Free Games - Best Apps	Games	Arcade (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	431,000
Ping Pong	Top Free Games - Best Apps	Games	Sports (Games)	Free	403,000
Smurfs' Village	Capcom Interactive Inc.	Games	Adventure (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	379,000
Groupon	Groupon Inc.	Apps	Lifestyle	Free	304,000
Mr Giggle 2 Lite	Koala	Games	Puzzle (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	301,000
Zynga Poker	Zynga	Games	Casino (Games)	Free + in-app purchase	299,000

Paid

App Title	Publisher	App Type	Category	Monetization Type	Downloads This Month	Price in €
Plants vs. Zombies	PopCap Games Inc.	Games	Strategy (Games)	Paid	188,200	2.29 €
Angry Birds	Clickgamer.com	Games	Action (Games)	Paid + in-app purchase	158,600	0.79 €
TuneIn Radio Pro	Synsion Radio Technologies	Apps	Music	Paid	137,800	0.79 €
WhatsApp Messenger	WhatsApp Inc.	Apps	Social Networking	Paid	103,500	0.79 €
Cut the Rope	Chillingo Ltd	Games	Puzzle (Games)	Paid + in-app purchase	102,700	0.79 €
Fruit Ninja	Halfbrick Studios	Games	Action (Games)	Paid	101,700	0.79 €
Tower Defense: Lost Earth	Com2uS Inc.	Games	Adventure (Games)	Paid	92,600	0.79 €
Angry Birds Seasons	Rovio Mobile Ltd.	Games	Action (Games)	Paid	89,600	0.79 €
Jenga	NaturalMotion	Games	Board (Games)	Paid	83,600	0.79 €
Angry Birds Rio	Rovio Mobile Ltd.	Games	Puzzle (Games)	Paid	82,600	0.79 €

The Rise of the European App Economy

2011), 25.7 percent were games, followed by communication and shopping apps. Games also made up almost 40 percent of the top 150 paid apps, followed by tools and productivity enhancing services. In general, the willingness to pay for games was less pronounced in the Android market: In the examined month, 6.55 million free games were downloaded and only 53,900 paid games (compared to 11.7 million free and 2.9 million paid games on the iPhone).

As the Android in-app purchase model takes shape, it remains to be seen whether users are more willing to pay for items within a game. In the analyzed month, of the top 150 free Android apps, 20 had in-app purchases (iPhone: 73) and 7 out of top 150 paid apps (iPhone: 54). While it's clear Android is a force to be reckoned with—boasting an app download growth rate of 85.3 percent vs. iPhone's 22.9 percent—iPad and iPhone app downloads combined are still more than twice that of Android apps (115.5 million vs. 50.4 million).

What's Next for Europe?

With 200 million devices sold globally, iOS presents a massive market. Android, a strong second with 150 million devices sold (as of summer 2011), is seeing amazing growth rates across the world and will most likely continue to flourish.

As a platform, Android is characterized by the large percentage of free apps. With the in-app purchase model now in place, developers of free apps have the opportunity to generate revenue, giving both the freemium model as well as alternative monetization methods (such as offer-based payments) an immense boost. At the same time, app discovery is one of the biggest problems facing this growing market as developers continue to search for innovative ways to acquire users.

With a rapidly growing app landscape, the European market is becoming more and more exciting in its own right, but so far localized apps are a rare sight in the top download lists. Given the tremendous success of localized (desktop) social games, and with location-

> With a rapidly growing app landscape, the European market is becoming more and more exciting in its own right, but so far localized apps are a rare sight in the top download lists.

based games poised to be the next big thing, local and localized content will certainly be more prominent in the future.

The foundations of a great app economy have been laid and the opportunities are there for the taking. ✻

A few years ago, Jessica Tams and Juan Gril came to a grand realization: Even though most of the submissions for content at the Casual Connect conferences were for games designed for the 35+ female gamer, there were a lot of casual games made for an entirely different audience. Thus, the Games for Gamers program was born.

Today, there are plenty of games made for people who are neither 35+ nor female, and they make up a significant portion of the casual games marketplace. In this issue, we talk about two great examples. First we'll look at a very original and successful strategy game called *Tentacle Wars* (4.25/5 on Kongregate, 4.43/5 on Newgrounds). Then we'll examine the most successful Facebook game for a male audience: *Monster Galaxy,* which has peaked at 19.2 MAU.

Finding Success as a Solo Developer

Tentacle Wars Postmortem
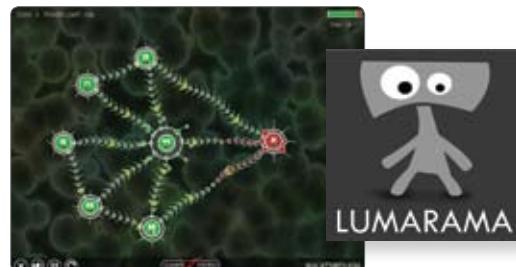
Whenever I work on a new game, I always think that it will be the "next big thing." In real life, of course, making the next big thing doesn't happen too often. But the good thing about this optimistic way of thinking is that it motivates you. I began *Tentacle Wars* with the same thoughts in my head—only in this case it turned into an actual (small) big thing.

I took inspiration for *Tentacle Wars* from a variety of sources: from *Phage Wars* and *Blobble Wars* I got the idea for game-play; and I took my inspiration for its graphics style from *flOw*, *Ef the Game*, and *Bubble Tanks*. There is nothing new about a game in which you must produce units, capture an alien base, produce even more units, and then capture even more alien bases. Indeed this is pretty much the basic prototype for every strategy game. Even so, *Tentacle Wars* isn't yet-anoth-

Building Social Games for Gamers

Monster Galaxy Postmortem

By the summer of 2010, it was clear that social gaming was here to stay, with Facebook's massive audience continuing to demonstrate an appetite for games. However, the range of available games on Facebook was rather limited. A few early leaders, most notably Zynga's *FarmVille*, had served as an example for countless other developers to follow, leading to a landscape overrun with simulation games primarily marketed to casual and non-gamers such as middle-aged women playing games for the first time.

Around this time, at Gaia Interactive we were planning ways to expand our product line. Gaia was among the first companies to pioneer virtual goods monetization with our avatar-based community, Gaia Online, so we had effectively been developing "social games" for several years. It seemed clear that we had the team, talent, and technol-

Games for Gamers – *Tentacle Wars*

er-clone; rather it's a further development of this idea. At least I hope so.

Sticky Game-play

Game-play in *Tentacle Wars* takes place in a sort of microscopic world inhabited by strange organisms of different colors, sizes and classes. Players control green life-forms, and all other colors are the enemy. Each life-form belongs to a certain class of evolution: Spore, Embryo, Pulsar-A, Pulsar-B, Ant and Predator. Spore is the simplest class, Predator the most advanced. During the game, your organism increases in power and evolves from class to class.

> When I came up with the *Tentacle Wars* idea, I conceived all of the details pretty much all at once. Right away, I wanted to make an actual prototype so that I could play the real thing.

The key to the game: Tentacles! You can grow a tentacle and attach it to another organism (one of your enemies). When your tentacle is attached, your organism starts pumping power into that enemy, at which point you begin suppressing the enemy's own power and causing it to degrade down to the simplest class of evolution. When your enemy's power reaches zero, the enemy turns into the life-form of your color. At this point you gain control over this new member of your army. The final goal is to capture all alien organisms.

Unfortunately your enemy has exactly the same weapon and objective! But enemy organisms can't compete with your clever tactics. There are a number of small tricks you learn

during game-play that make it possible to win even when your enemy has more powerful life-forms than you. Discovering and mastering those tricks is what makes the game fun and challenging.

Looking for Inspiration

Tentacle Wars is my third Flash game. Previously I built *Hate Red*, a mini-clone of PopCap's mega-popular *Peggle,* and *CosmoBlob,* a remake of an old game called *Jump* that I played long ago on my first and favorite computer—the Atari 65XE. *CosmoBlob* turned out to be a total failure. In the modern world of physics puzzles and tower defenses, why did I expect to create a popular game using as inspiration the computer of my childhood? What was I thinking?

Nevertheless, this failure didn't stop me at all. It prompted me to analyze popular Flash games. I didn't analyze all popular games—only those that I liked to play. There are a lot of games on the front page of Kongregate or Newgrounds that I don't like so much—games in which I don't even want to finish the first level. The reason? They're not interesting at all. I've learned you can't create a good game if you don't get why it is good. You should understand the fun that makes this game so popular. I found I liked games like *fl0w*, with simple abstract graphics. And I was interested in creating something related to a micro-world. I started to think in that direction.

The Creative Process

I try to play with every good idea as if the game were already built. I'll play mentally with the idea for at least two or three days before I start to do *anything* with my hands. Very often I get bored quickly playing the non-existing game in my head. That's how I know I'm not going to create that game.

In contrast, when I came up with the *Tentacle Wars* idea, I conceived all of the details pretty much all at once. Right away, I wanted to make an actual prototype so I could play the real thing. In fact, the game I imagined originally was a much deeper and more complex game than the game I ended up building. But during the development I realized that even the basic idea alone was interesting enough to make a Flash game.

Searching for a Sponsor

After about three months, the game was almost done. To find a sponsor, I submitted the game to FlashGameLicense.com (FGL). Even though the game was about 95 percent complete (only last levels were still to be done), I was pretty sure that sponsors didn't care about last levels provided the initial levels were good enough. The first levels are the most important because they make people want to continue playing and return later to the sponsor's portal.

According to my experience, you need from two to four weeks to get a good deal on FGL. During this time I planned to finish my game. But I got the first bid for *Tentacle Wars* ($500)

just 30 minutes after submitting it to FGL. At that point, I thought: "Success! I'll get a lot of good bids very soon." But real life isn't a fairy tale. During the next two or three weeks I got 10 bids from four different sponsors. But they all had pretty much the same value—not at all what I expected.

I learned that sponsors don't want to pay good money for simple games like *Tentacle Wars*—even if they like them. In such cases, it's best to go with a performance deal in which the sponsor pays for every visitor your game sends to its portal or for the number of game-plays worldwide. This kind of deal is good for both the developer and the sponsor—because there is no risk that the sponsor will pay a lot of money for a non-successful game, and there is no risk that the developer will sell a successful game for too little money.

Unfortunately, not every sponsor is willing to go with a performance deal. But Gamezhero.com does—so my sponsor choice was easy.

by Elya Sikerin,
Lumarama;
Ukraine

Building on Early Success

Tentacle Wars was released in November 2010 on Gamezhero.com. During the first week, game-plays rose to a peak of 300,000 per day. After two weeks we submitted the game to Newgrounds and Kongregate where we reached a peak of 270,000 plays per day. As a result of that early success, almost instantly both Newgrounds and Kongregate promoted the game on their front pages—and from there the game was off and running. On Kongregate, *Tentacle Wars* won third place as the best game of month. I started to see more and more reviews and walkthrough videos on YouTube. Success!—especially valuable for me in contrast with my previous *Cosmo-Blob* failure.

Energized by that great start, I started to think about making an iPhone version of the game. At that point iOS development was a new territory for me. But I always wanted to go in that direction. Even so, I was not sure if a game like this would be well-received by

Although Chillingo didn't want to discuss any details without first seeing the game prototype on an iOS device, FDG was prepared and able to discuss all details right away. Since I don't like uncertainty, I decided to go with FDG.

iPhone users—so I sent emails to a couple of iPhone publishers that I knew: Chillingo and FDG Entertainment. The email was something like this:

"Hey! I'm going to port my successful Flash game (here is the video) to the iPhone. Would you be interested in publishing this game?"

Surprisingly, both publishers replied very quickly. And both liked the game and agreed to publish it. Although Chillingo didn't want to discuss any details without first seeing the game prototype on an iOS device, FDG was prepared and able to discuss all details right away. Since I don't like uncertainty, I decided to go with FDG.

At the same time, Gamezhero agreed to release a *Tentacle Wars* level pack. It was February 2011, and I found myself learning and testing different iOS development environments while working on the level pack at the same time. By March, I had finished the level pack (*Tentacle Wars: The Purple Menace*) and was ready to conquer iOS!

Looking Ahead

As of September, 2011, the original Flash version of *Tentacle Wars* had generated more than 12 million game-plays in just nine months, and *The Purple Menace* had generated eight million more (in just six months). Even today, the two games get more than 30,000 game-plays each day.

As I write this article, *Tentacle Wars* for iPad is 95 percent ready. Yes, it will be released for iPad first and shortly after that on iPhone and iTouch. Why? The thing is *Tentacle Wars* seems to have been born to be played on the iPad! And I would like to bring out the best game experience first. Ultimately, *Tentacle Wars* for iOS will include multi-player mode (missing in the Flash version).

Plans for the future? In general, I plan to extend the game and make it deeper, implementing all the features that were in my head at the very beginning and even more. In addition, there is the *Tentacle Wars* Wish List (at lumarama.com/blog) where I'm collecting fan suggestions for *Tentacle Wars 2*. Fortunately the game has many fans with very good ideas. ✳

Games for Gamers – *Monster Galaxy*

ogy necessary to capitalize on the opportunities of the Facebook platform. However, our core demographic—the audience we best understood—was gamers. The majority of Gaia's users were between 13 to 30 years old, owned gaming consoles, and shunned Facebook games as not being as appealing or as fun as the games they were used to playing.

We had to make a decision: Should we follow the direction of other developers on Facebook? Or should we stick to what we know best and build a Facebook game for the audience of "gamers" who, thus far, hadn't demonstrated much interest in Facebook games? In considering these options and arriving at our decision, we formed beliefs that became the foundation of our strategy. The value proposition of social gaming—the ability to play games instantly with your friends for free on a site you're already visiting daily—is compelling to any audience, especially gamers. There simply

> We believed that for any game to be successful in this genre—regardless of the platform—the game had to create an emotional connection with the players through the visual presentation.

weren't many examples to draw from and in fact, the demand for games on Facebook wasn't being met by the current supply. We believed that an enormous population of gamers would enjoy playing games on Facebook once there were games that appealed more to this audience. We felt that we could appeal to gamers by drawing inspiration from the most popular games from traditional consoles, and that in so doing we could expose new casual and non-gamers to tried-and-true game mechanics that had delighted audiences for decades.

The Inspirations for *Monster Galaxy*

Monster Galaxy came from several different sources of inspiration. Our creative team, led by Gaia's co-founder Charles Park, had long-standing ideas about incorporating a pet system into Gaia Online–ideas we had refined into various prototypes and explored in Gaia's aquarium game. These ultimately became the foundational ideas behind *Monster Galaxy*. In addition, I had previously developed *(fluff) Friends*, one of the first games on Facebook, and so for over two years I had been musing about how to make a virtual pets game more engaging.

What's more, all of us at Gaia loved console games. As we were discussing potential social game ideas, we did an intellectual exercise exploring all the top-selling console games of the past 30 years and discussing what each would look like on Facebook. How would these games look in that context? We wanted to create a game inspired by one of the most popular video games of all time—and for all the reasons mentioned before, we were the most excited about the wildly popular pet-collection RPG genre, led by the iconic Pokemon games.

Code Like No One's Planning

We firmly believe that it doesn't take a large team to build a great game. *Monster Galaxy* was developed by four engineers and four artists, and it took about five months from the first discussions to the day we launched. The entire team was in-house, collaborating tightly and rapidly prototyping ideas based on our frequent discussions. Development was iterative. There were no dedicated PMs, producers, or game designers outlining the plans in advance. Rather, the team's tech and art leads took charge while I helped guide decisions and provide direction. But, there was no clear document with our full roadmap, only a constantly evolving set of features written on a whiteboard and a sense of urgency to arrive at a viable product to launch.

While this loose development process allowed us to move very quickly, it came with a great many trade-offs that at times made the project very difficult. Disagreements were frequent, and while having everyone on the team give their input helped provide a huge variety of great ideas to choose from, it was often a challenge to cut off the brainstorming and pick a direction. Another negative consequence was that occasionally we would make a step in the wrong direction, working on a design or feature before realizing that we were going to run into significant issues if we continued down that path. Even so, in the process we learned quite a lot about what we needed to do to make the game successful, so this work was never truly "wasted."

Our largest misstep was the main navigation in the "world." For several weeks, we planned for the game's core navigation to take place on a 3D globe that users could spin around. We did most of the work to build this UI, created textures for the map, and started placing locations on the globe. However, when we were trying to use the prototype, there were so many issues that we finally stopped and asked ourselves: "Is the globe core to our game, or is there a simpler solution?" We decided to scrap the idea of the globe entirely and instead built the 2D map system used today. If we had spent more time planning up front, we may have been able to anticipate issues with the 3D globe, but because we were constantly racing to build, we only realized after building it that it wasn't what we wanted.

This Doesn't Look Like a Facebook Game

Since our goal was for *Monster Galaxy* to appeal to an audience of gamers, it was critical for us to create a highly polished experience with production values that rivaled console games. From the beginning, we focused heavily on the artwork, characters, story, and music. We discussed and debated these aspects of the game with passion and intensity. We believed that for any game to be successful in this genre—regardless of the platform—the game had to create an emotional connection with the players through the visual presentation.

The monsters of *Monster Galaxy*, which we call Moga, are celestial creatures each belong-

ing to a zodiac sign. We wanted the game to be as broadly appealing as possible, so in an effort to attract both men and women, we aimed for each zodiac sign to include monsters that fell into one of three categories: Ferocious, Cute, or Quirky/Funny. There wasn't a specific plan for how many monsters we wanted to make or a description of what each one was supposed to be. Instead, we gave our talented artists free reign to let their creativity flourish, drawing anything they were passionate about. This worked very well, resulting in an incredible variety of over 130 monsters.

Some early design decisions had a big impact on what we ended up building. When evaluating the classic RPGs that served as our inspiration, we saw many aspects that would translate well to a Flash-based game and some that didn't make as much sense. For example, avatars didn't seem to have a place in *Monster Galaxy*. We couldn't see a clear reason why players would need to walk around a map since we wanted them to click on where they would like to fight and jump immediately into action.

For the game-play itself, we wanted the game to be a casual RPG with depth. We explored complex battle systems involving additional stats, more items, ways to customize specific monsters with *equip-able* attacks, and consumable accessories to make them more powerful. However, we found that none of those plans were truly making the game more fun. And so we kept the battle mechanics just simple enough that savvy players could improve their chances by making better decisions, but there was essentially "no wrong button to click," and players were capable of making forward progress simply by clicking any buttons. Within this framework, however, we layered in depth by encouraging players to pursue any of three related goals: to capture all the monsters, to explore the whole map and complete all the quests, or to train their monsters to the highest level.

We wanted to flesh out the game world, making the game feel like an experience where everything "belongs." Because we added small elements of story into our game mechanics, players could immerse themselves more fully into the game. One example is the way players can call a friend into battle to help them win a fight. This "bonus attack" comes as a result

of using a "whistle," which can be harvested from a whistle tree located at that friend's ranch. Another simple example is our item shop. To frame the reason why players can buy items at any time from any location, we wrapped the shop in the fiction of being a "Sky Shop" where a helpful crew of Sky Cats fly around a mobile marketplace. By adding these charming elements to the game, we hoped the world of *Monster Galaxy* would feel coherent—as opposed to a jumble of social game mechanics slapped together.

The result of all of these decisions was that as soon as we started bringing in testers to play the game, we heard the same feedback time and time again: "This doesn't look like a Facebook game." We took that as a compliment.

It's Not Their Fault They're Doing It Wrong

User testing was absolutely critical before launching *Monster Galaxy*, and looking back, we feel it was one of the most valuable investments we made during the development process. We did three types of user testing: internal testing, Craigslist testers, and Usertesting.com.

Internal testing came first. Everyone on the team was encouraged to play the game and give feedback. There were many instances of developers or artists testing the game, noticing something that could be improved, and writing the idea down on the whiteboard to be fixed later. The turnaround time for this kind of rapid iteration was sometimes only a matter of days—often faster—and it is how we

came up with many of the ideas for game features and UI tweaks.

Once the game was more stable and had a tutorial in place, we posted ads on Craigslist and Facebook offering to pay $25 for people to come in and be "game testers." We brought in players of varying levels of experience, from those who were very familiar with Facebook or RPG games to those who had hardly played any.

We did not have a fancy setup for our user testing. We brought testers into a conference room, they played the game on a laptop and their screen was connected to a larger screen. The whole team sat around the table and watched them play. This proved to be quite effective and we caught so many instances of players getting stuck or confused that every user testing session left us with a great to-do list of things that we needed to fix to make the next session more successful.

The first rule of user testing was that we did not talk at all during the test sessions. We just let the testers play and we watched. If they made mistakes or got stuck, we did not help them. If they asked questions, we would not answer. Perhaps we'd reply with a follow-up question, like "Why are you asking?" or "What do you think you're supposed to do?" But it

Games for Gamers – *Monster Galaxy*

was critical not to lead them towards a solution or create anything that made the test environment artificially constrained. We wanted to let the testers make mistakes. At the end of the session, we'd leave a few minutes to ask questions. "Did you notice that button? Why didn't you click it?" "What would you do next if we hadn't stopped you right now?"

Another important aspect of our user testing is that the entire team would attend these sessions. It was invaluable for the people building the game to watch players playing the game because each of us would spot something different—since you tend to notice the things that you have had a hand in. It was sometimes so painful to watch someone struggling with our UI, but that provided the greatest motivation to make improvements.

Sometimes user testing surprised us in unexpected ways. One notable example was when we brought in testers who were very familiar with games on Facebook and had them run through several battles in *Monster Galaxy*. One of the buttons in the battle interface calls a friend for a powerful bonus attack. We originally labeled this button "Call Friend." However, we found that testers avoided this button and would almost never click it. Sometimes we could even watch as players would hover over this button for a second but decide not to click. We asked why these testers were so hesitant to click the "Call Friend" button, and the response was always the same: They were worried this button would spam their friends by forcing them to send a request or post to their wall. Indeed, they were turned away from clicking on anything that used the word "Friend." It was notable how much the social gaming audience in late 2010 had grown weary of the viral tricks some applications used to abuse friend relationships. We changed the text on the button to instead say "Bonus Attack," and despite the fact that the button did the exact same thing, the reaction was very positive. Testers specifically said how much they enjoyed and appreciated calling their friends into battle.

Finally, around the time that we were opening the game to public beta, we started using Usertesting.com extensively. This was a valuable tool for making sure new users were able to do everything they needed to do without

getting stuck or frustrated. After the Usertesting.com sessions it became apparent to us that if we need a player to click on something, we should put an arrow on it. We also used Usertesting.com to watch testers play competitors' games, which helped us nurture more of an intuition around how testers interact with games and what they react positively to. The tool helped us discover many of the clever aspects of successful games that we may not have noticed from our own biased viewpoints.

An important lesson we learned from watching Usertesting.com is that we simply could not have enough tooltips. Our original expectation was that gamers would explore the interface by clicking on the various buttons just to see what would happen. We hoped players would learn through trial and error and discover the game by exploring all aspects of it on their own. This was not the case. If we did not spell out exactly what was going to happen when you clicked on an attack, testers would not click on it, sticking instead with the one attack they had learned about in the tutorial. Rather than lengthening the tutorial to exhaustive absurdity, we took the approach of trying to incorporate education into the experience itself, explaining right in the mo-

ment everything there is to know about each attack with a large mouse-over tooltip. We worried at first that this would reduce some of the game-play, but we found the opposite to be true: The more informed players became, the more they enjoyed the game.

Once we arrived at a point where the testers were having so much fun playing that they couldn't stop long enough to answer our questions, we knew we were ready to launch.

Now the Real Development Begins

Prior to launch, everything is guesswork—especially when you're bringing to Facebook a whole new genre. You can try to make informed predictions with the help of marketing research and user testing, but nothing in the development of an online game compares to the amount of incredibly relevant and applicable information you get from launching to real users.

One major post-launch lesson that hit us hard was that we had, in fact, created a game for males. We had made efforts to make the game appealing to both genders, but males were more valuable users, demonstrating better stats of all of our four key metrics: retention, engagement, monetization, and virality.

Women who did end up engaged monetized just as well, but it became clear once we had driven a significant install volume of both genders that it made more sense for us to focus on male users.

Another key post-launch lesson was that although we had balanced the two main items in the game to be equally scarce and necessary to make progress, the item associated with capturing and acquiring more monsters (Starseeds) had significantly higher sales than the item that restored your health and allowed you to continue playing (Blue Coffee). This information helped us to completely reprioritize our roadmap around true impact. In that sense the real development had just begun: We finally had all the tools we needed to move forward with confidence.

Although Gaia Online is an established online gaming community, *Monster Galaxy* was an expansion initiative. It was critical to be able to bring in a new audience to engage with our company's products outside of our destination website. With this goal in mind, we turned extensively to acquisition marketing. We divided the spend into five tiers based on the country of the users and the potential lifetime value of traffic from that country. We further divided our spend within each tier based on gender and age range, and from there we experimented with everything. We optimized around reach and revenue, with the goal of acquiring users where we could earn back the cost of the acquisition in the first three months. However, shortly after our launch, we noticed we were earning back our investment in only two weeks, which allowed us to expand our marketing efforts and adjust our CPIs until we found a strategy that allowed for sustained growth for several months.

Small Changes Make a Big Difference

One of our initial design philosophies in *Monster Galaxy*, which became a catch-phrase among the team, was to "put a cat on it." Whether it was modals, ads, icons, or logos, our initial instinct was to fill the game with cute cat-like creatures. This thinking stemmed from Gaia Online, where this aesthetic has worked incredibly well. So even though the game was about battling monsters, we rationalized that cats made sense and would help us attract both females and males.

It turns out that being gung-ho on cats wasn't always the right decision. We had cats on everything from the welcome screen to the tutorial. When we started advertising our game, our marketing analyst found that one ad with a dragon preformed much better than our ads with cats, and he suggested we change the app permissions icon to a dragon. We gave it a try and it resulted in nearly a five percent increase in new users clicking "Allow." This made it clear to us how important the new user experience is—not just the first five minutes, but indeed the first five seconds.

Another surprising post-launch lesson was whether or not we should show the intro movie. *Monster Galaxy* has a 20-second animated intro sequence which we felt helped frame the experience—similar to how an intro movie is used in many console games. However, because this movie wasn't interactive, we grew concerned that players—especially new players—would leave before even seeing the game at all. We ran an A/B test in which we showed the intro movie to half of new players and skipped it for the other half. While indeed there were slightly more new players who got through the early portions of the game when we omitted the trailer, we were shocked to learn that users who see the trailer ultimately prove to become better users. There were significantly more users who came back the second day in the group that saw the trailer.

A/B testing is now an important part of our design process. We aim to A/B test nearly everything we do.

Just the Beginning for Games on Facebook

We continue to believe that building games for gamers is still the largest untapped opportunity in social gaming. The fact that we have been able to build and maintain our large user base for several months—while significantly decreasing our marketing spend and increasing our revenue—makes it clear that this is just the beginning for games like *Monster Galaxy*.

As a final note, I see a huge opportunity for the mainstream gaming industry and the owners of the most popular video game brands to expand into social and mobile platforms. I hope to see the two worlds, social gaming and console gaming, become more connected in the future, and Gaia is in a great position to help make that happen. ✳

Want to be a distribution
partner or learn more?

Email us: b2b@intenium.de

How PopCap Went from Sexy Action Cool to EA

History in a Timeline

"FUN IN A CART"
XX EXTRA PTS XXX   100

It all started about 10 years ago, in an attic apartment in Seattle with three twenty-something refugees from the dot-com start-up wars. Casual games were barely a blip on the gaming map when PopCap's three founders—John Vechey, Jason Kapalka, and Brian Fiete—decided to combine their experiences from other game companies with their passion for simple, fun games. No other company illustrates the rags-to-riches rise of casual games quite like PopCap, whose founders stayed true to their vision while game industry greats scoffed at their little gem-swapping game as " …not even a game!" Of course *now* we know now that *Bejeweled* is played in every corner of the world on every game platform imaginable, and in a stunning validation of casual games in general and PopCap in particular, game industry giant EA has put up more than $1 billion to acquire our homegrown heroes. But what did that path from A to B look like? Read on…
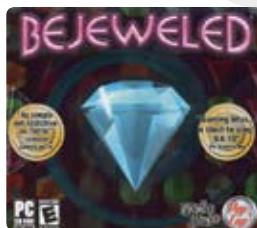
2000

> PopCap is formed—as Sexy Action Cool—working out of an apartment in Seattle.

> *Foxy Poker* released.

> John and Brian move to Argentina for four months to drink wine.

> *Diamond Mine* (now known as *Bejeweled*) downloadable game launches, kicking off the "casual game" business. Licensed to Microsoft for $1,500 a month.

> *Bejeweled* appears in Penny Arcade comic, featuring Jesus Bejeweling

2001

> PopCap featured in *Time*.

> *Bejeweled* released on mobile.

2002

> Brian buys a yellow Porsche Boxter. Jason buys a Honda Civic.

2003

> *Zuma* released.

> *Bookworm* released.

2007

2005

2004

Chuzzle

BEJEWELED 2

t sprout games

Peggle

2004

> *Bejeweled 2* released.

> *Bejeweled* inducted into the Computer Gaming World Hall of Fame—the only puzzle game other than *Tetris* to receive the distinction.

> With just 15 employees, Pop-Cap turns down a $60 million offer to buy the company.

2005

> Dave Roberts joins PopCap as CEO.

> PopCap acquires Sprout Games.

> *Chuzzle* released.

2006

> PopCap launches two of the original 10 scroll-wheel iPod games.

> Seventeen of PopCap's products become available via Steam.

> PopCap opens a European office and mobile studio in Dublin, Ireland.

> PopCap opens a San Francisco game development studio.

> *Bookworm Adventures* is featured in a Penny Arcade strip— the only time that John Candy and *Bookworm Adventures* have ever been mentioned in the same context.

2007

> Brian gets married in Peru.

> PopCap acquires Retro64.

> PopCap acquires SpinTop Games.

> *Peggle* released.

2009

2010

2011

2008

> PopCap's *Bejeweled* franchise reaches 25 million units sold— more than six billion hours played worldwide since launch.

> PopCap opens Asia/Pacific office in Shanghai and names James Gwertzman VP of Asia/Pacific.

2009

> PopCap secures $22.5 million investment in first-ever round of funding.

> Jason gets married and moves to an island off the coast of Canada.

> *Plants vs. Zombies* released.

> *Bejeweled Blitz* launched on Facebook—rockets to 10 million MAU.

2010

> *Bejeweled 3* released.

> *Guinness World Records* names *Bejeweled* "The Most Popular Puzzle Game Series of the Century."

> PopCap's *Plants vs. Zombies* becomes the top-grossing iPhone launch ever.

> *Bejeweled Blitz* and *PvZ* are two of of the 10 top-grossing iOS games cited by Apple.

2011

> John buys a Prius.

> PopCap acquires Zip Zap Play.

> EA acquires PopCap.

Raising a Dragon

The Key to an Application's Long Life in the App Store

Nevosoft launched its Mobile Applications Department in March, 2011, and within the first six months more than one million users had downloaded Nevosoft games from the Apple App Store. To achieve that level of success, we had to start small but think big. Here's what we mean:

Let's say that our beta version (ready and playable) of a game for iOS is like a tadpole. Our goal is to raise it into a strong and powerful dragon.

Many independent mobile application developers don't know how to promote their games or simply underestimate the importance of promotion, thinking that the quality of the product alone will do the trick.

In this metaphor the development of a game is represented by the legs—something that needs to be in place before it's released on the App Store. The wings that you need to soar to the summits of high sales represent game promotion, especially at the time of the application's release. And the tail is decreasing or stable product sales at the later stages of the game's lifecycle. It's the tail period sales that determine how much money the developer makes. But before you get there you have to take good care of the legs and wings.

Giving Your App Legs

It all starts with the legs—the development. The main challenge for conventional downloadable casual developers when they start to work in the world of mobile apps is to start thinking—from the very

earliest stages of development—about the many aspects that don't have to do with the application's main game-play. These aspects fall into several large groups.

For instance, you'll want to connect your game to the well-known social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and VKontakte (Russia's largest social network). And of course, you'll need to support Apple's Game Center service. Game Center support is particularly important not only because of its general service of keeping and showing high score tables, but because Game Center Games is the only promotional slot on iTunes accessible to a "regular" application that is not in the top charts or featured by Apple.

Unlike other distribution channels, the App Store allows developers to place game ads inside their games, and the universal spread of wireless Internet makes such cross-advertising very attractive. The key is cross-promoting your applications within every game you publish. As you prepare an app for release through the App Store, you'll want to build in that sort of "free" advertising for your other products.

Adding an analytical tracking module to your game allows you to follow the application's lifecycle. In addition, you should be sure to respond promptly to user requests. By releasing updates that are in tune with customer wishes you start building a loyal community and improve game reviews. We've seen users give a game higher ratings after an update's been released.

None of these tasks seems overwhelming by itself, but together they add a great deal of time to the game's development period. For instance, the first time we paid proper attention to these details—when working on *Dream Sleuth*—it took two programmers and a month of work to add social and advertising functions to the game.

With every new game and every new release, "the legs" grow stronger. We keep adding new social and promotional functions to our applications even as

we continue experimenting with a variety of new features. All this makes us more and more visible to users.

Helping Your App Take Wing

To make our dragon soar to the highest peaks we have to give it wings. It takes a perfect combination of all the essential elements and an integrated approach to get the game to the top. Unfortunately, many independent mobile application developers don't know how to promote their games or simply underestimate the importance of promotion, thinking that the quality of the product alone will do the trick. This might hold true for core games, yet on mobile platforms the competition is so tough that the customers can simply miss the new product entirely, never getting a chance to see its quality. That's why you either have to hire a publisher or take on the risk of doing it yourself.

In this case the App Store is your only distribution channel—and it has rather limited promotional opportunities. Basically, all you get is your application's page, so you must take full advantage of it and maximize how you use it.

Choosing a name for your application is another thing that requires careful consideration. An ideal name is catchy, easy to pronounce, and reflects the game's content. Uniqueness is also important—so be sure to check that your name hasn't already been taken by someone else. Don't be tempted to mimic a popular name of an existing game; it might breach copyright and give you a competitor too strong for you to handle.

Keywords are next. Finding the perfect keywords can take a lot of time, and common sense remains your best advisor. Keep in mind the App Store only gives you a hundred characters, so be prudent: omit the spaces between words (a comma is enough to separate keywords). Find the keywords that best describe your game and then throw some popular search requests into the mix.

Next comes the promo art, which in this case is limited to the game's icon and screen shots. The icon is perhaps the most crucial element to the game's success: It's the icon that draws the attention of the user. Its level of attraction is what gets customers to go to your app's page—or not. Understanding what icon will work comes with experience—sometimes the original and final designs can be a few days' work and over 150 versions apart. While there

is no universal solution, here's some basic advice: test your icon on the App Store. Just take a screen shot and place your icon in the mix. How does it look compared to the icons it's competing with?

Screenshots are the next thing customers will look at when they open your application's page. Apple allows you to slightly alter the screen shots' look. Take advantage of it and highlight your game's distinct features. Add some catchy slogans to emphasize the game's most appealing characteristics

by Kate Zholobova & Denis Konovalov, *Nevosoft;* **St. Petersburg, Russia**

How do you grow a long and robust tail? The answer is keywords. When your game drops out of the top, keywords are just about the only way that users will be able to find your game.

(what's special about its game-play, design, content, etc.) and provide appropriate screenshots. Use them to create some exciting collages that will make it easy to decide how good your game really is.

When users like the screen shots but are still not sure whether to download the game, they will look at the description. The App Store allocates 4,000 characters for a game description, but don't use it all just for one game. Break the description into three or four paragraphs and make sure the game's key features are highlighted to catch the eye. Use the remaining characters to cross-promote your other games.

One more thing: When your application is released in more than one language, don't forget that both the description and the keywords need to be localized. The game's title may have to be localized as well!

To get your dragon off the ground it's equally important to choose the appropriate category and day for release. In order to make the right choice you'll need to carry out a little research. First, pick a few categories into which you think your game fits and watch them for a week or two. This basic research should answer the following questions:

> What category has the lowest competition?
> On what day of the week are most games released?
> On what day of week were the top games in the categories released?

Make sure your press kit is ready before the release as well. The standard package includes a press release, a review, some screen shots, a video and the game's icon. We suggest putting a downloadable press kit on your website. Inasmuch as Apple requires an online presence, you may as well use it to communicate with site editors who show interest in your game (and might want to write about it). Disseminating reviews takes a certain amount of time and money. If you have more time, you can compile a database of game review sites yourself, or if you can spare the money, get a review promoting service to do the job.

When you hit the long-awaited release day, make sure you get as many users as possible to download your game as soon as it appears. We like to send promotional emails to our mailing list subscribers and to embed cross-promotional ads of the new game in our other applications. This effort ensures that the game gets the first wave of download traffic, a favorable wind for propelling the dragon's wings.

Strengthening the Tail

If you have done a good job to this point, then by the time the wings have grown tired after the first sales peak, your dragon will have grown a tail. A high level of initial downloads is necessary just to make the flight possible, yet it's actually the tail that determines how profitable the application will be.

How do you grow a long and robust tail? The answer is keywords. When your game drops out of the top, keywords are just about the only way that users will be able to find your game. So you'll want to be creative. For instance, take the opportunity to refresh your keywords every time you release an update. You'll get noticeable results by altering some of the relevant keywords.

In addition, keep in mind that a good update can give your game a new lease on life. A number of updates must be planned and developed beforehand. Work out an update release schedule, including new levels, new functions or game localization in a new language. Public holidays are always a good occasion for launching updates. On top of that, updates bring more media coverage and attract more attention to your apps.

Other things that can help your dragon grow a long, healthy tail:

> Always follow up on customer complaints and be quick to respond. Complaints can be a source of new ideas that can improve your product.
> Have promotional offers and giveaways. If your game is a paid app, you'll get 50 new promo-codes from the App Store after every update launch. Have a promo-code giveaway drawing on your Twitter or Facebook page or use one of the online promo-code services to bring in new customers.
> Modify prices. Offer discounts in conjunction with an event. This could be something like public holidays, weekends, new game releases or a 100,000th game download.
> As we've said before, you should always have ads of your other games inserted into every new game you release. Nevosoft developed its own advertising network which allows us to seamlessly place banners within our games. These banners have a CTR of up to 10 percent, with a visible impact on sales.

It All Starts with a Few Tadpoles

So there you have it—the basic principles underlying our out-of-the-gate success. It has not been easy, by any means. But it is certainly achievable for any developer with the vision and drive to turn a tadpole into a mighty dragon. ✳

BIG FISH Games™

Get Your Game to the Masses

PC • Mac • Mobile

Are you a game developer with a great game to share? Partner with Big Fish Games for world-class game distribution. Because we originated as a casual game developer, we truly understand the unique needs of our development partners. Helping developers succeed has earned us a reputation for being fair, supportive, and extremely responsive in the casual games community.

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www.BigFishGames.com

To get in touch with our Developer Relations team, contact
GameSubmissions@BigFishGames.com

Getting Social in Asia

A Local Perspective

Although their users may look similar, each of Asia's key social gaming markets has a very different dynamic.

At international events like Casual Connect, when colleagues from other social gaming companies find out we work for Happy Elements, there are plenty of questions about the Asian social gaming market. "Is it true that…?" "How did you guys…?" "Do you think it would work if we…?" Their interest is not simply due to the fact that we're a Beijing-based developer and publisher. It's due also to the numbers: Since we were founded in March 2009, we have grown to 240+ employees with over 2.3 million daily active users on Facebook, making Happy Elements Asia's largest developer on the platform.

In the social gaming universe, Facebook English is—bar none—the big prize, but it is also the most competitive market, with many developers fiercely contending to share its users and profits. However, considering that in 2010 an estimated 70 percent of virtual goods revenue derived from the Asia/Pacific region, Western developers are increasingly trying to figure out how they can be part of the action out East. Which helps explain why we get so many questions at Casual Connect.

All Look Same?

As any diligent geography student could tell you, the continent of Asia contains over 50 countries, starting in the Middle East, crossing the Indian sub-continent all the way up to the Pacific. But for our purposes, when we refer to the Asian social gaming market, we refer only to the key East Asian markets of Japan, Taiwan, Korea and mainland China.

But even that short list can be a bit daunting for outsiders. For years now, Westerners interested in Asia have been challenging themselves on their familiarity with Asians by taking the quirky test on alllooksame.com. Is that cute girl in the picture Chinese? Is that cool guy with the rocker's hairstyle Japanese? Or maybe Korean? It's sometimes pretty hard to say, but one thing is very clear: Although their users may look similar, each of Asia's key social gaming markets has a very different dynamic.

There are the obvious translation issues. There are also the less obvious culture and localization issues in Asia. No, Taiwan does not use the same character script as mainland China. Yes, China is still sensitive about Japan. Even so, many young Chinese love Japanese manga. It is true that Korea used to be looked down upon in Japan, but these days Korea is cool across East Asia, including Japan. And yes, there are officially no social games (yet) in North Korea—although who's to say that their eccentric Dear Leader Kim Jung-Il isn't playing *Farm-Ville* in secret?

Beyond the standard translation and localization issues, developers coming to Asia must ask themselves, "What platforms should we be on?" "What payment methods are best?" "What are the specific technical integration concerns?" The list goes on. Such questions suggest a lot of new decisions facing developers accustomed to only one English version of a game on the monolithic mega-platform that is Facebook. And such are the basic challenges confronting any developer who wants to develop a pan-Asian strategy.

Take it from us. We have faced all of those challenges ourselves.

Taking Baby Steps in Taiwan

Many social gaming startup success stories have an element of luck, or at the very least, good timing as in the case of Happy Elements. After setting up shop in March 2009 and launching *My Fishbowl* on China's renren.com, in August we launched *My Fishbowl* on Facebook for the Taiwan and Hong Kong markets.

by Per Besson,
Happy Elements
Beijing, China

INTERNET USAGE IN ASIA'S KEY MARKETS

	Population*	Internet Penetration	FB Penetration
China	1,336,718,015	36.28%	0.04%
Japan	126,475,664	78.42%	3.50%
Korea	48,754,657	80.89%	8.00%
Taiwan	23,071,779	69.99%	46.37%
Hong Kong	7,122,508	68.50%	53.33%
Taiwan/Hong Kong***	30,194,287	69.63%	48.01%

*June 2011 Figures (source: Internet world stats)
**August 2011 Figures (source: socialbakers)
***Total of traditional Chinese script markets

ASIA'S MAIN SOCIAL GAMING PLATFORMS

Market	Name	DAU*	Top game DAU*	Top Game Type	Platform MARPU**
Taiwan/Hong Kong	Facebook	5,500,000	1,500,000	Fish	$0.30-$3.00
Japan	Mixi	3,500,000	200,000	Farm	$1.00-$5.00
	Hangame	2,500,000	200,000	RPG	$1.50-$6.00
	Mixi Mobile	800,000	300,000	Farm	$3.00-$6.00
	GREE Mobile	1,300,000	300,000	RPG	$4.00-$8.00
	Mobage Mobile	1,200,000	600,000	Pirate	$4.00-$8.00
Korea	Cyworld	280,000	70,000	Fish	$1.00-$4.00
	DAUM	80,000	20,000	City Building	$1.50-$4.00
China	Tencent	20,000,000	10,000,000	RPG	$0.10-$2.00
	Renren	3,000,000	700,000	RPG	$0.10-$0.50
	Kaixin001	3,000,000	2,000,000	City Building	$0.10-$1.00

*in some cases these DAU are estimates.
** Monthly ARPU figures are a range across various genres and are meant to give a general idea of monetization.

While mainland China uses a simplified Chinese script (created after the 1949 Revolution to increase literacy rates among the Chinese masses), Taiwan, Hong Kong and the scattered Chinese communities of Southeast Asia retain the traditional script. As Taiwan represents some 70 to 80 percent of traffic, the platform that uses traditional Chinese is often referred to as the Facebook Taiwan platform.

The *My Fishbowl* launch occurred as Facebook Taiwan traffic was in its initial explosive growth phase, with very few games available. Perfect timing indeed. Less than two years later, this game has reached semi-cult status in Taiwan, reaching a total of 16 million in-
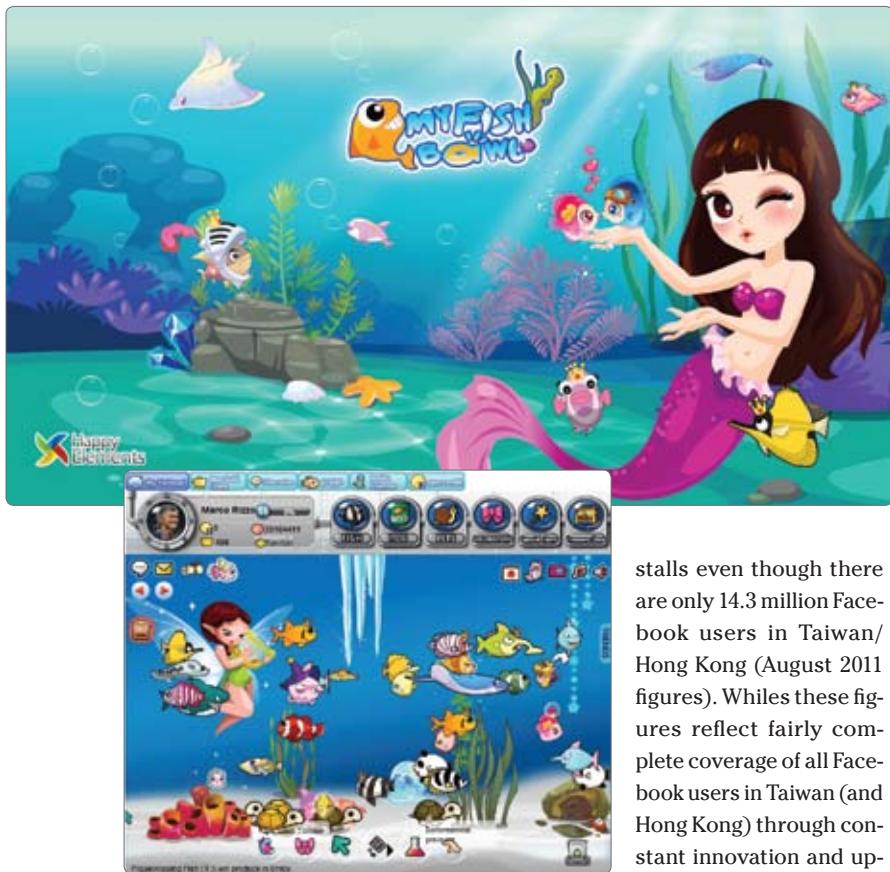
My Fishbowl: #1 game in Taiwan in terms of DAU and #1 Fish Genre on Facebook.

stalls even though there are only 14.3 million Facebook users in Taiwan/Hong Kong (August 2011 figures). Whiles these figures reflect fairly complete coverage of all Facebook users in Taiwan (and Hong Kong) through constant innovation and updates, they also suggest cases of multiple installations for some users.

Although fish-related games across Facebook have been in gradual decline, *My Fishbowl* has managed to defy classic social gaming lifecycle dynamics by providing a constant flow of new functions and virtual goods. The 1.5 million DAU for this game has allowed us to aggressively cross-promote other games as well. For example, *Happy Kingdom* and *Forest Adventure* generated 800,000 and 600,000 installs respectively during a weeklong promotion.

Diving Off the Facebook Platform

Facebook is the dominant social network in all significant world markets except for Japan, Korea, China and Russia. Consequently, the one-size-fits-all Facebook approach to social gaming leaves big gaps in monetization for the key markets of Asia. Only a company that dives off the Facebook platform can exploit the region's potential.

As can be seen in *Table 1*, levels of Facebook penetration in China, Korea and Japan are extremely low. In the case of China, where the government blocks foreign social media sites such as Facebook, just a trace amount of traffic sneaks through—in large part expatriates or those Chinese who have lived abroad and who access their international networks through VPN/proxies. The local Chinese don't miss what they don't know, as they have plenty of their own social media to choose from (Tencent, Renren, Kaixin001). These local social media minimize the risk of being blocked by practicing "self-censorship," something that Facebook would not be willing to do. Japan and Korea, despite having very high levels of Internet penetration, also have their own homegrown social network platforms that so far have proven resistant to the worldwide homogenization.

Expanding into Japan and Korea

After becoming the big fish in the fishbowl of Facebook Taiwan (we currently have 40 percent of DAU on this platform), in April 2010 Happy Elements launched *My Lounge Bar* on Mixi, Japan's largest PC platform. Currently *My Lounge Bar* and *Happy Kingdom* occupy second and third ranking on the platform. Happy Elements has since branched out to the Hangame PC platform as well. Expanding our foothold in Japan, we have moved onto the all important, and more heavily monetized, mobile market with "pocket versions" of our *Lounge Bar* game on Mixi Mobile, Gree and Mobage. Since local regulations allow platforms to make payments only to companies that have a legal entity and physical presence in Japan, we have opened both an office and a development studio there. This presence has allowed us to heavily localize our games and develop our mobile platform while continuing to expand our position in the market.

In Korea there are currently three main social networks. Cyworld is an open platform which is by far the largest. In addition, there are two smaller platforms of similar size: Naver, an open platform, and DAUM, a closed platform which restricts access to a select number of developers. We have gone onto Cyworld as well as DAUM, where we have both the top game (*Happy Kingdom*) as well as the largest number of DAUs among developers.

As we have done on Facebook Japan, we are now also launching *Happy Kingdom* onto Facebook Korea. Although we see the Facebook platforms in these

> The market potential of China is tantalizing, but it is not for the timid, requiring a good dose of insiders' *guanxi*.

Business Development and Western language localization team.

two countries to be very much in their incipient phases, our internal Global Integration Platform allows us to connect with these platforms with an efficient use of resources.

China: "If Only…"

Ah, the market of China—the dream of many in the business world. "If only each Chinese person would buy just one of our widgets once a year. Imagine how rich we would become." The market potential of China is tantalizing, but it is not for the timid, requiring a good dose of insiders' *guanxi*.

Although much of our efforts have been involved in expanding internationally, our roots are in mainland China. Our top management—CEO Haining Wang and CPO Rony Xu—are both from renren.com, and our CTO Cong Ling is ex-CTO of Myspace China. These social network roots have allowed us to cultivate a strong presence on the main local platforms: Tencent, Renren and Kaixin001.

The number of people on social networks in China is simply staggering. There are close to 500 million Internet users in the country and over 400 million on Tencent's mass market Qzone social network, with 20 million social gaming DAUs. It's easy to see why so many mainland developers are fighting to establish a presence on these platforms; however, it's often difficult to gain access to the platforms without the help of a top tier local developer who can ensure access to promotional resources.

General Market Panorama

Table 2 gives a general picture of the primary Asian markets. Unsurprisingly, China offers high DAU numbers and generally low monetization (RPG games being an exception). China's platforms often exercise their power over the many domestic developers, locking them into exclusive "you can't put your game on any other platform" deals as well as lower revenue shares. Japanese platforms (especially mobile) have extremely high rates of monetization, offsetting the relatively low user numbers. Korea still has a pretty modest social gaming market by DAU but promises fairly high monetization figures. On the traditional Chinese platform of Taiwan and Hong Kong, very high Internet and Facebook usage guarantees high DAUs and decent monetization. In fact, *My Fishbowl*

has been a Top 10 game (by DAU) on Facebook and the top non-English game on Facebook every month for well over a year.

Asking (and Answering) the Right Questions

Whether you decide to work with a regional game publisher such as Happy Elements, work with individual local partners for each platform, or try to adopt a do-it-yourself approach, it is important to answer the following questions as you prepare to expand into Asia:

> How will we not only translate/localize but continuously update and provide customer support?
> How will we handle technical integration with individual new game platforms and payment methods? Are there any legal or licensing restrictions against foreign companies?
> How will we strongly promote our game to reach the desired DAU/monetization levels?
> Should we try to compete in this market? Given our game's profile and each platform's user base and competing games, would this be a good market to enter now?

A good publisher can help you answer these and other basic questions.

The Future Is Asia

Our company is called Happy Elements because the goal of our games is to bring moments of happiness, pleasant distraction and fun to our users in China, across Asia and around the world. We feel lucky to work so closely with the dynamic markets of Asia. We hope that at future international events we will be meeting many more interested colleagues over a beer or a cup of tea. No doubt there will be much, much more to talk about. ✳

More Than Just a Pretty Face

The Vital Role of Women at Absolutist

Women's curiosity is the best weapon while testing games. No girl can resist the temptation of clicking every button! As a result, no bug is left unnoticed.
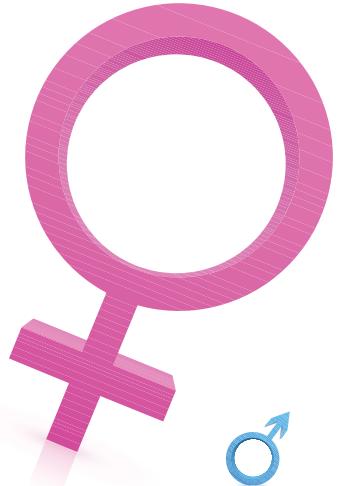
The IT world is widely believed to be a men's club: According to recruiting agencies, the proportion of women working in IT is hardly more than 30 percent. Perhaps that doesn't sound like a very impressive number at first, but there is good reason to believe that that percentage will continue to rise. Think about it this way: A woman is not only an attentive and disciplined employee, but she also makes any staff more attractive. Don't believe me? You should check out Absolutist!

Why Everyone Wants to Work in Marketing

The story of Absolutist started in 2000 when there were only three men to write it. But quite soon these men discovered it was not so easy to create more and more casual games and port them: The guys needed operational help. And it happened that the fourth person hired was a lady. Since that time it has been a rule that at least half of Absolutist's staff is made up of women, and from time to time this proportion changes in favor of the girls. At the same time, the company's management is absolutely sure this proportion is one of the company's great competitive advantages. When I came here to work I didn't believe the gender balance was somehow relevant to the company's success in the market, nor did I believe that it really mattered at all. But as the days went by I liked the idea more and more.

At Absolutist, matriarchy prevails in both marketing and production. The men in these two areas

are the exceptions—but are the envy of all the others. It's as if the fairy tales about sultans and padishahs have come to life: The men in these departments are surrounded by beauties suited to fit every taste. Do you think such distractions harm productivity? Quite the opposite! Knowing that they are being watched by numerous beautiful maidens, the men complete their work in record-breaking time in order to win all the ladies' hearts. Who would pass up such a chance?

The marketing managers of Absolutist are a special group of people who have replaced the term *functions* with *aims* and *tasks*. Every specialist in the department has to feel instinctively which casual game will be on top, explain these trends to the technical team, test the product when it's ready and then persuade the potential audience that this particular game is the one they need. Thus, in the near future we'll be releasing a series of new games for iPhone, Android and Desktop—simultaneously. Although the technical side of the project rests on the men's shoulders, the women are the ones who define what games the men are expected to create. After all, women are the primary audience of casual games. And who knows what a woman wants? That's right! Another woman!

Seeing Things Through a Woman's Eyes

Women also have the best sense of how other women want the product to look. Because the design and the general appearance of a game are the first things

by Valeriya Mallayeva,
Absolutist;
Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine

A blue flash mob
is on the agenda.

Fancy-dress party
devoted to two million
downloads of *Bubble
Shooter* for iPhone.

users notice, getting the look right is essential. Even though the number of men and women in the art department is roughly equal, Tatyana Bunda, the head of the department, gets the final say. "My word is always a deciding vote," she says. "It means I can always insist on any idea, though it is always interesting to know how the men imagine the things that will seem lovely in the woman's eyes."

There are plenty of books devoted to the differences between women's and men's perceptions, and we strive to use those differences to our advantage—even when it comes to testing. According to Regina Vishnevskaya, Producer at Absolutist, "Women's curiosity is the best weapon while testing games. No girl can resist the temptation of clicking every button! As a result, no bug is left unnoticed."

Outside the office, our marketing managers are required to represent Absolutists' image at all conferences. They are also competent diplomats when it comes to negotiations with partners around the world. In essence, every marketing manager is expected to win over as many casual game fans as possible in spite of the fact that there is no step-by-step manual. Consequently, the department attracts mainly driven girls who have style, grace, and silver tongues. Our contracts with Big Fish Games, GameHouse, Microsoft, Shockwave, PlayFirst, AOL, iWin and many others are solid proof that the girls are good at their job.

Challenging the Stereotype

It seems that the programming department is the only place in Absolutist that hasn't been occupied by women yet. But Tatyana Garat, the Business Development Director, insists that this is just a question of time. And her arguments are hard to refute. "It doesn't matter whether you're a woman or a man. Professionalism is not a question of gender. Gender is not a criterion when a person is hired. It so happens that men are more likely to study technical subjects in the universities while women prefer the humanities. But when a girl decides to become a programmer—trust me—she doesn't do it on a whim. She's going to be the best because she'll have to face down the common, 'no country for women' stereotype."

Tatyana is right. During Absolutist's history there have been five female programmers, and three of the company's five departments are headed by women right now. Even the story of Tatyana's career is a nice illustration of her own words. She came to Absolutist to work as an interpreter, and two years later she became the Business Development Director. Absolutist is a place where your abilities are really appreciated and where you'll find the best conditions to develop those abilities. So it is no surprise that the company is widely known as a talent factory in Dnepropetrovsk. ✣

Bursting the Game Bubble Rumor

Why the Tech Industry's Hottest Sector Is Poised for Continued Growth

The fear of another technology bubble is washing over the gaming industry like a bad case of the flu, tainting important decisions about everything from investments to innovations. Many see the current wave of financial news from Facebook, Zynga and PopCap Games and draw comparisons with the great Internet boom and its subsequent collapse. Trepidation has nearly paralyzed some game studios as they worry about starting production on new titles. Analysts have also begun to question the valuations of recent investments in the gaming market, while some gaming companies feel pressured to sell before the bubble bursts.

But will it?

Market Outlook

A gaming market crash might complete Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* trilogy, but I highly doubt we'll see a gaming market crash—or *Wall Street 3*, for that matter—anytime soon. We are witnessing rapid growth in the technology industry due in large part to gaming, but don't be too quick to call it an industry bubble. A bubble, by definition is a glossy coating that encases nothing but air. In other words, bubbles are empty.

Take, for instance, the infamous Internet 1.0 days between 1996 and 2000, when companies were raising millions in capital on promises alone and when trading with unverified IPOs led the tech industry. The dot-com crash of 2000 was a direct result of the glossy coating of the Internet that encased nothing but insolvent companies.

More than a decade later the tech industry is once again experiencing a new evolution that has attracted the masses and the money. Zynga has become one of the fastest-growing technology companies in history, and it now rivals some of the largest game studios in the world, including Electronic Arts

As they always seem to do, consumers are itching for the next generation of gaming experiences.

and Activision Blizzard. Zynga, a four-year-old social gaming company, is currently valued at $10 billion on $2 billion in revenues with exploding growth.

Electronic Arts, threatened by the competition from new entrants in the games market, acquired casual game studio PopCap Games for $750 million, plus up to $550 million earn-out following the release of Zynga's IPO intentions. While Zynga and PopCap Games are valued at ten times their revenue, both are growing at huge rates given the new landscape

of the gaming industry, and both are profitable. That's a far cry from the kinds of fundamentals we saw in the dot-com crash.

Today's tech industry, which encapsulates the gaming market, looks very different in comparison. The current market has several sustainable businesses including game studios showing real revenues and

Developers and publishers now have the freedom to create the games they want, tap into new revenue streams and make financially sound decisions about development, distribution and pricing.

real earnings. Sure, scattered throughout the industry are a few companies like Zynga, Twitter and Facebook that have valuations ten to twenty time higher than revenues, but these companies are the exception and not the industry standard.

This isn't a bubble, in other words—it's capitalism at work. And this mega-shift in the gaming industry is both powerful and pervasive. The current market brings game studios more choice, more opportunity, and with that, more competition than ever before. I believe this is the best time to be in the gaming industry—especially if you're a casual games developer—because it is now your time to *level up*.

Unleashing Game Development

For far too long, console makers dominated the gaming industry with a stronghold on game development. Developers were obligated to take the risk to create games that cost tens of million of dollars to produce. Small shops couldn't even compete in the console market without additional financial backing. We mostly heard about large game studios that produced and published blockbuster franchises like *Halo*, *Madden NFL* and *Super Mario Brothers*. Casual and PC games were considered inferior in terms of innovation, market share, and mind share, and indie developers were just unemployed game designers.

That has all changed. The gaming industry has gone through a major transformation fueled by a rapid expansion of social networks and the prolif-

eration of connected mobile devices like smart phones and tablets. Competitive pressures from new entrants, like Zynga, and new innovations, such as mobile and social, have disrupted the console market—for the better.

Today, the console market is no longer driving the gaming industry as it once did. More consumers are now choosing to come online via PCs or mobile phones to purchase and play their favorite games. In fact, global revenue from micro-transactions is expected to be as large as revenue in the console market by 2013 according to ThinkEquity.

These advances in the industry have unleashed game studios from the console market. Developers and publishers now have the freedom to create the games they want, tap into new revenue streams, and make financially sound decisions about development, distribution and pricing.

Not all gaming companies will approach these newfound liberties wisely, of course. But those companies that make smart business decisions in the current games market will become more profitable, and as a consequence, they will have financial opportunities to explore new innovations they may have not had before. Such studios will drive the future of this industry, and they will bring forth new gaming experiences that will surpass the game-play available on five-year old consoles.

Now Everyone Plays—Even Your Mom

Video games no longer have to carry a $60 price tag and require a console. This has helped the gaming industry expand beyond the core demographic—males between the ages of 13 and 35 years old—to reach the masses. Now you might not play the same games as your mom, but there's no question that gaming has become mainstream entertainment. In fact, Electronic Software Association (ESA) reported that 42 percent of all gamers are women, and women over 18 years of age are one of the industry's fastest growing demographics.

This growth is attributed to casual games that are free-to-play, created for the masses, and offer social experiences. And we're just getting started. There are more than 300 million people playing these games with their friends on Facebook, and Google+ has jumped into the game too.

The casual games market is not only experiencing a remarkable up-tick in adoption rates, but there's also significant growth in consumer spending. About 31 percent of the overall online gamer population has used real money to buy virtual goods according to a

by Matt Hulett, *GameHouse;* **Seattle, WA**

new study by Visa's PlaySpan and VG Market Study. And the report indicates that women are three times more willing to make these purchases than men.

At the same time, the growth in the casual market doesn't reflect the entire industry: The console market, for instance, has actually dipped to its lowest point in five years. According to the research firm NPD, retail sales for video games in the U.S. reached their lowest point in July 2011 since October 2006. Overall, new retail sales for hardware, software, and accessories totaled $707 million for the console gaming market, a decline of 26 percent year-over-year.

Once recognized for driving innovation and blockbuster games, the console market is now saturated with five-year-old hardware and expired game franchises. It seems clear that a vast majority of consumers who have played game discs are fatigued from over-playing and over-paying for last-generation experiences. I wouldn't be too surprised if many of these gamers are beginning to play their mom's video games, in fact.

The Next Generation of Gaming

As they always seem to do, consumers are itching for the next generation of gaming experiences. It's been about five years since Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony launched any new game systems, and future releases seem very distant. Developers are limited by the experiences tied to current generation consoles, but they know that next-gen consoles could mean higher game production cost. Profiting from these titles is also high risk, since next-gen consoles would need to scale—so developers may be reluctant to produce next-gen console games. And no games mean next-gen consoles can't scale, and so the dilemma begins.

This doesn't mean that the console market is dead. In fact, a large percentage of households have at least one current generation system, which means developers are more likely to recoup the cost to produce console games based on scale. It's not innovative, but it is available.

There's also another option. I believe the true next-generation of gaming centers will be on free-to-play gaming experiences accessible on social and mobile networks. Facebook just recently launched a suite of new features designed specifically to increase the social, sharing and engagement aspects for games. It seems that no other category of content gets the same degree of customized attention from the world's largest social network. Google's content focus at the launch of Google+ is equally telling. Once the social communication basics were in place, games were the first order of business.

The fact that two of the world's largest aggregators of online users continue to put their weight behind games experiences is strong evidence that very real, fundamental trends are driving growth in the games sector. Studios will no longer depend solely on the console market, and those that produce a robust portfolio of free-to-play games will be able to successfully capitalize on this mega-shift sweeping over the industry.

So as we look to the future of gaming, I think Gordon Gekko said it best in the 2010 movie release of *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*: "It's not about the money. It's about the game." ❋

This isn't a bubble—it's capitalism at work.

Made a Flash Game… Now What?

The Who, What, Where, When and Why of Flash Game Distribution

There is tremendous opportunity out there for Flash game developers. In June 2011 alone, flashgamelicense.com, the Flash games online marketplace site, sold 212 games for a total of $422,558 (according to the site's sales data). However, knowing how to make a Flash game does not necessarily equate to knowing how to make money off a Flash game. To help you navigate these sometimes tricky waters, here are the basics—the Who, What, Where, When and Why of licensing your Flash games—from the perspective of someone on the buying side.

> Most portals are focused on getting the best content— and are willing to be flexible and offer a variety of deal types in order to get that accomplished.

Who… Are the Buyers?

Flash games make great content. Site operators love them because they attract new visitors, improve user retention and sometimes can even compel dedicated players to open up their wallets. And on top of being great content, they're incredibly simple to integrate into sites.

So consider yourself lucky! You've got a long list of suitors. Not only are there many sites and apps looking for great content, but also they need lots of it. Most major gaming sites are releasing new content on a daily basis to keep their sites fresh and relevant, and they rely on developers to make the games they need to keep this up. Sites like Kongregate, Newgrounds, Armor, MiniClip, Addicting Games, Yahoo Games, Games.com, Y8, Mesmo and MindJolt (my company) are just a few of the buyers looking to fill a persistent pipeline. The audience these top portals hold is sizeable. According to Appdata.com and Compete.com, in July the major gaming portals comprised over 37 million MAU (monthly active users).

What…Are the Deal Structures?

Most portals are focused on getting the best content—and are willing to be flexible and offer a variety of deal types in order to get that accomplished. Options include: revenue sharing (partnerships that divide profits from in-game advertising), a range of licenses and sponsorships, and sometimes custom arrangements if demand for the game is high.

Some developers prefer the revenue share model so they can participate in the success of their game. This can be a great option. At Mind-

by Jill Schneiderman,
MindJolt;
San Francisco, CA

Jolt, we have numerous examples of developers who have achieved significant returns through revenue sharing. However, due to the sheer volume of games offered by most major portals, many developers benefit more from the security of an upfront licensing model. Such agreements provide guaranteed income and allow developers more control over their financials. If, like most developers, you'd prefer the stability of a licensing agreement, there are three main deal structures you should consider:

1. *Exclusive Sponsorships* are exactly what they sound like: exclusive. One buyer (the "sponsor") will pay to have their branding (and only their branding) in the game, wherever it goes online. Although the developer retains authorship of the game, the contract typically stipulates that only the sponsor can distribute the game.

2. *Primary Sponsorships* are a concept pioneered by the Flash gaming marketplace site, FlashGameLicense. As with Exclusive Sponsorships, the buyer attaches its branding to the game and distributes it across the Internet at its discretion. However, the developer retains the right to also sell "Site-Lock" licenses (see below).

3. *Site-Lock Licenses* are non-exclusive deals that allow the buyer to use the game on its own portal but prohibits it from distributing the game to any third parties. Many developers who opt for Primary Licenses use Site-Lock licenses as a secondary source of income for their games.

Terms and prices for each of these deal types can vary from portal to portal, but in general, Exclusive Sponsorships command the most money, followed by Primaries and then Site-Locks.

There is money to be made with all deal structures, but different deals are right for different developers. When determining which deal is right for you, ask yourself these questions:

› *What are my main objectives?* Clearly, objective number one is to make money; otherwise, you'd be giving your games away for free. (MindJolt accepts donations by the way, and I'm sure the other portals would say the same!) After profit, what are your long-term objectives?

You should pursue an Exclusive if you have a phenomenal game you think can command a high price and you want to build long-term relationships with specific buyers.

You should pursue a Primary if you place more value on building your own brand and want the flexibility to sell your game to multiple partners, in addition to your Primary sponsor.

You should pursue Site-Locks in conjunction with a Primary if the terms of your Primary agreement allow for it—which most do. However, some fine print mandates the exclusion of Site-Locks. You should avoid this stipulation whenever possible, because the ability to sell Site-Locks in addition to the Primary License is the main advantage of choosing this path.

You should pursue Site-Locks exclusively (in conjunction with no other deals) if you want to make many deals with many partners so all your eggs aren't in one basket. This approach generally requires you to make many more deals, which can be time consuming, but can also result in very high revenues if you can convince many sites to license your game non-exclusively.

› *What is my game really worth?* It's crucial to understand the value of your own game. Because the effort was personal, it may be hard to be objective. You can gauge interest for your game by uploading it to Flashgamelicense.com and putting it up for bid as an Exclusive. If two weeks pass and you haven't gotten the bids you hoped for, it's time to reevaluate the perceived value of your game.

Instead of falling into the common trap of waiting for extended periods of time to see if your game will eventually command a higher price, reevaluate your options and seek out a new deal structure. In this case, if you started with an Exclusive, approach all the bidders to determine whether they'd be interested in a Primary or a Site-Lock license instead. It's quite possible that you can still hit your financial goal through multiple deals.

Where... Can You Connect with the Buyers?

Getting your game seen is the first step to getting your game sold. There are three major ways that buyers are finding games:

› *Personal Relationships*: If you are serious about becoming a successful Flash game developer, you want to have personal relationships with as many of the major portals as you can. Let the buyers tell you directly what type of content they're really looking for, what's currently trending on their sites, and what features or genres they'd pay top dollar for. I recommend participating in the portal's developer forums and getting to know the community managers. Through a relationship with them, you can find out who

Most major gaming sites are releasing new content on a daily basis to keep their sites fresh and relevant, and they rely on developers to make the games they need to keep this up.

is in charge of licensing and build a personal relationship there too.

> *Game Sites*: As someone charged with sourcing content, I spend countless hours on other game sites, searching for fantastic games and looking up the developers. With this in mind, securing widespread distribution for your games brings more value than just the revenue from the deal. It can also provide you with a free marketing campaign that raises your profile and helps you become discovered as a developer. Even if the particular game in question is unavailable due to deal terms, you've now connected with a future potential buyer and have grown your network.

> *Flash Game License (FGL)* (www.flashgameli-cense.com): FGL is *the* largest marketplace for Flash games. Every major buyer uses this site to find games. Simply upload your game to Flash Game License for free and pay a small commission only if you make a sale. They can also help you with pricing and term expectations to ensure you're getting a fair deal.

When... Approaching a Buyer, How Do I Give Myself the Best Chance at Success?

Once you've made a great game and found a potential buyer, you still have to close the deal. Buyers get inundated with sponsorship requests, but there are certain things you can do to stand out from the crowd:

> *Know your audience.* Volume of emails does not equal depth of relationship. I recommend contacting buyers only when you have content that is appropriate for their users. If a buyer from Armor Games gets five emails from a developer about princess and rainbow-themed dress-up games, he will probably ignore all five emails. More importantly, he'll then be conditioned to ignore the sixth email, which may have actually contained a game perfectly suited to his site.

> *Send links that work.* Due to size constraints on some inboxes, it's always best to send a link to your game instead of sending the SWF as an attachment. When sending the link though, it is important to make sure you do not create any extra work for the buyer: The link should go directly to the game, all video advertising and password inputting should be temporarily removed for quicker access, and (most important) the link should always work. The less time it takes buyers to access the actual game they're evaluating, the higher the chance they will give it serious consideration.

> *Include deal proposals.* The more specifics you can provide the better. At the very least, you should clearly impart what deal structures you'd be open to discussing; at best, you should include a price range for each potential deal. If a buyer is on the fence about your game, but sees that you're willing to negotiate a good deal, it is more likely to contact you.

Securing widespread distribution for your games brings more value than just the revenue from the deal. It can also provide you with a free marketing campaign that raises your profile and helps you become discovered as a developer.

Why... Is No One Buying My Fantastic Game?

So let's say you've done everything right so far—made a great game, identified the right deal structure for it, located the potential buyers and reached out to them in the most professional way possible—but no one is buying your game. Why?

If you have a great game on your hands, there *is* a buyer out there who wants it. Most likely, if you find yourself in this position after doing everything mentioned above, your game isn't selling because you're not approaching the *right* buyers. Flash games are not one-size-fits-all, and knowing your audience is of the utmost importance. No matter how good a game is, it won't attract attention from buyers unless it makes sense for their users.

Portal owners are experts in knowing their own audience (they have to be), so the smartest thing you can do as a Flash game developer is take the time to learn those portals—and think about who you want to sell to when you're making your games. I recommend going onto the portals you want to work with and looking at their most popular games. What is the common thread that links those games together? Again, reach out to the portals directly, or find them through FGL, and ask what they're looking for and what would make them pay top dollar for a game. Doing this extra research is the best thing you can do to increase the "value" of your games. ❊

Blending Games of Chance with Games of Skill

PART 1: The Inspiration Behind
Battle Slots

by Bryan VanDaele

How can an activity that requires absolutely no skill be turned into a game that requires thinking and strategy? That's the main question that we had to answer when designing *Battle Slots*, a game combining the mechanics of a slot machine with the depth of a role-playing game.

My name is Bryan VanDaele, and I am the Lead Designer of *Battle Slots*. Let me start by telling you about my "normal" job. I work at Phantom EFX as a game designer. Phantom EFX is known for making slot machine and casino video games for PCs, mobile devices, and consoles. On an average day, my job involves coming up with brand new slot machine concepts, as well as quests and adventures for our online casino MMO, *Reel Deal LIVE*. Now when you think of slot machines, don't think of the standard three-reel slot machines with mechanical spinning reels. Our slot machines are packed with interesting features, complex bonus rounds, high resolution graphics, incredible art, and beautiful sound and music. Bonus rounds can range from as simple as 10 free spins to a quest to rule Olympus by defeating all of the Greek Gods and Goddesses. I try to make each slot a completely different experience from the last and to make each one a game in and of itself.

In the Slotsmith, players can customize their slot symbols and choose which summon to use during combat.

The fact is, a slot machine is a game of chance, 100 percent. There is no skill involved in winning or losing. While you are sitting at a slot machine, a random number generator is flipping through spin results thousands of times a second. At the exact millisecond you press the "SPIN" button on a slot machine, the random number generator stops and the machine knows where each reel will stop—and whether you will win or lose. The reels are displayed and spun for the player, and the anticipation of each reel stopping keeps the player entertained and hoping for a big win. Each spin is its own event—there are no "hot" machines, or machines that are "due" for a big win.

Adding in Some Skill

My video game passion has always been role-playing games. I've been playing them for most of my life, everything from the gold box *Dungeons and Dragons* games through *Diablo* and up to *Dragon Age*. Because of my passion for the genre, a lot of my slot designs are fantasy-based. I've always wanted to find a way to blend the slot machine mechanic with a role-playing game. But how could we turn this completely random, reel-spinning machine into a game with skill and depth? A few slots that we've released have role-playing elements and battles used on a limited basis (we have one called Armies of Osiris that features Egyptian gods doing battle), but we've never had the time or the manpower to fully flesh out the idea.

I started working on a design document for a slot machine/role-playing game hybrid in my spare time, leaving it and going back to it many times throughout the months. When a window opened up in our production schedule for a new game idea, I pitched *Battle Slots* to the guys holding the checkbook. They

by Bryan VanDaele
& Nathan Sherrets,
Phantom EFX;
Cedar Falls, Iowa

wanted to see a full design, so I spent the next week getting the design document up to par. I presented it, they liked it, and production planning got started right away.

The original design I submitted differed quite a bit from how the end game turned out. In the original design, I had all the spells and attacks that your

King Ember's tower rises from the earth in a lava-blasted land.

character could execute linked directly to the symbols on the slot machine. So if you discovered a Fireball symbol while questing and installed it in your slot machine, whenever you spun and hit a payout on that symbol you would cast a fireball on the enemy. A payout of 3 fireball symbols would be less effective than a payout of 5 fireball symbols.

This system was wireframed out so that we could give it a shot. And to tell you the truth, it just wasn't very fun. You sat there and spun the slot and never had to use any strategy or skill in order to defeat the enemy. How your spins turned out was still 100 percent luck, and it got old pretty fast. Other than choosing which symbols to place in your slot machine, you had no control over the route each battle took.

A Better Solution

So the design was reconceived. We developed instead a system of "pools" that you build up in order to execute attacks and spells (we call them Techniques). Winning spins of Magic symbols adds points to your Mana Pool, and winning spins of Weapon symbols add points to your Attack Pool. Each Technique uses a certain number of points, so once you win enough points from spinning, you can use a Technique. Some Techniques damage the enemy; some make your slot machine more powerful by adding Wilds or increasing payouts. We came up with hundreds of different effects. So basically you spin to fill up pools and then use those pools to kill the enemy.

This modification added a whole new level of strategy to the game, allowing each player to decide what to use and when. Do you save up points to try to execute your powerful and damaging attack on the enemy, or do you cast a cheaper spell that allows you to spin your reels twice as fast as they can? Each

player can play in a different way, finding the "best" Technique layout and use.

This added the level of skill and strategy that we had been missing to the game. It turned the slot machine into the "dice" that are normally rolled to determine results in a role-playing game. The player would still use strategy prior to battles to set up their reel symbols and Techniques. Then during the battles the random spin results would force the player to use strategy to determine the best route to defeat the enemy.

The Techniques we designed were a complex mix of standard role-playing game attacks and unique slot machine mechanics. The Techniques that affected the slot machine reels were what would set this game apart from anything anyone had ever played before. We used some features that you would find in our other slot machine games, such as additional Wilds that fall on the reels, or payouts that are doubled for the next 10 spins. We also added Techniques that would speed up your reel spinning and give you multiple spins to each one of your enemy's. We allowed you to lock your opponent's reels for the next three spins, or double your fire-based damage for the next 12 spins. Each enemy you encountered would also have its own unique set of Techniques, so we had to come up with hundreds of different Techniques to be used throughout the game.

We were continuously surprised during our design and testing periods at how differently the game could be played based on which Techniques you acquired from the enemy during your journeys. The Techniques you earn are dropped randomly when battles are won, so one player would have a totally different set of Techniques to use than another, and as a result their strategies would be completely different. It makes the game fun to play through more than once—to see just how different the game can feel.

Many other details of the original design were also changed, added, or removed. We had a great team of story writers, artists, programmers, testers, voice actors and actresses, and sound guys who continually played and tested the game and came up with innovative ideas to make it even more fun along the way. All of their ideas meshed in and changed the original design, so in reality everyone that you see on the credits of the game should be listed as a designer. I feel that we were very successful in our first attempt at blending the randomness of a slot machine with the strategy and skill of a role-playing game, with the end result being a darn fun game to play.

The Techniques that affected the slot machine reels were what would set this game apart from anything anyone had ever played before.
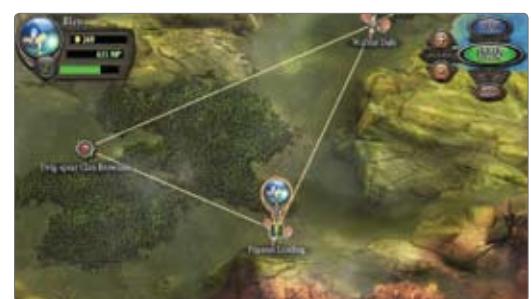
The map will show the locations you can visit, as well as quest locations and required character information.

PART 2: Developing the Story & Quests of *Battle Slots*

by Nathan Sherrets

The whole problem of world-building in a game like *Battle Slots* revolves around one question: How do you mix a fantasy setting with modern slot machine design? Unfortunately, that isn't an easy question to answer. The entire development of *Battle Slots* was a very organic process, and world-building and quest development weren't any different.

Weekly meetings contributed fuel to the fire. Ideas were thrown around by every member of the team including engineers, artists, designers, and even the producer and art director. Every single member of the *Battle Slots* team knew that building this game would be a challenge. By supporting each other in all roles, we were able to pull it off.

Building a World Around Slot Machines

Once the art for the map was complete, I was given free rein to design the world however I wanted. I started by literally filling out the map. The first thing I did was build the lands the people within the world would live in. I named 102 locations across six diverse regions with their own attributes. Each named location was then mapped together to create progress for the game to travel. A lot of decisions went into the process of mapping out the exact path the player would take. I had to take into consideration pacing,

Over a hundred hand-painted monsters populate the land for the player to battle.

variety, dead ends, backtracking, difficulty curve, and chapters of the story. It might seem backwards that I literally mapped out the path the player would take before I wrote the quests and the lore of the world, but in my mind it gave me a framework within which to work—a scaffold that I could then use to paint the world with my creativity.

At its core, the world of *Battle Slots* is simply a generic fantasy world. By naming locations and deciding a path, my mind was free to wrap all the creative excess around it that would make it unique. Naming the land itself was simple: I merely Googled the Latin word for *earth*. Tellus was the result. Once I named the world Tellus, I was on my way to having the hard part done. As a *Dungeons and Dragons* player of many years, I knew wrapping my head around the world would reveal the secrets within it, even if my mind was making them up as they were being "revealed."

Mixing Slots and Fantasy

The biggest question we had to answer was: How do you mix a fantasy setting with modern slot machine design? Looking back, the answer is simple: You don't. Modern slot machine design is so complex that anything you come up with to try and explain it in a fantasy world would seem contrived or false. In my fiction, I want everything to feel true, even when it isn't. The fantasy genre requires more suspension of disbelief than any other genre. I decided that I would simply lean upon the suspension of disbelief that players experience whenever they play a fantasy role-playing game.

In the world of Tellus, slot machines exist—no explanation required or provided. It is as if we tell the player: "Slots exist. This is fantasy. Now have fun and quit asking questions." And it worked! Anybody who plays *Battle Slots* finds the slot mechanic mesmerizing, and everyone understands how to battle in RPGs. Casting spells and using Techniques is intuitive, and the players are in their comfort zone.

To make the slot machine important I simply attached the word "magical." Once that was finished, I relied on the addictive nature of slot machines melded with the addictive nature of a good RPG to capture the player's imagination and drive the story.

Captivating Gameplay

Once the problem of explaining slots was addressed, I had to figure out how to get players to keep spinning it over and over again. The result? Over 200 quests, 102 locations to visit, around 100 monsters, 97 Techniques for the player to discover, 37 runes for the player to discover and attach to their slot

With our limited team (two designers, three programmers, and three artists) and limited budget, we chose not to build in extraneous features and mechanics and to stick instead with what we knew worked: the battle system.

machine, 25 animals to put in your zoo, 21 summons to find, and 6 companions to help you along the way. And you can't forget about the stores or the ability to increase the effectiveness of certain buildings that will help you along the way. In all, it adds up to over 20 hours of game-play.

Once the world was built, the game mechanics hammered out, the art completed, and the music finished, all that was left was to build the quests. To achieve this I moved my desk to sit beside the engineers. We needed a quest system that gave me control to move the player across the map however I saw fit, at any given time. This was accomplished by working very closely with Jeff Russell, an extremely talented programmer. As I began writing quests, I would have ideas about how they would work. I would run them by Jeff, he would code them, I would test them, and we'd move on to the next quest. Then whenever I had another idea, we repeated the process. Every time I had an idea for what I wanted to make the player do, or how a quest was presented, or ways I could conceal information or do any other number of things, Jeff would nod and code my request in a manner of minutes. It was pretty amazing, and allowed me to pretty much do whatever I wanted without any hesitation.

The problem with a game like *Battle Slots* is there is really only one thing a player can do: you can go to battle against monsters. With our limited team (two designers, three programmers, and three artists) and limited budget, we chose not to build in extraneous features and mechanics and to stick instead with what we knew worked: the battle system. With that in mind, I needed to have flavor text that was entertaining and fun to read, including references to pop-culture old and new (like you see in LOST and Darkwing Duck).

I'm the sort of game player who reads every single bit of flavor text. I read every codex in *Dragon*
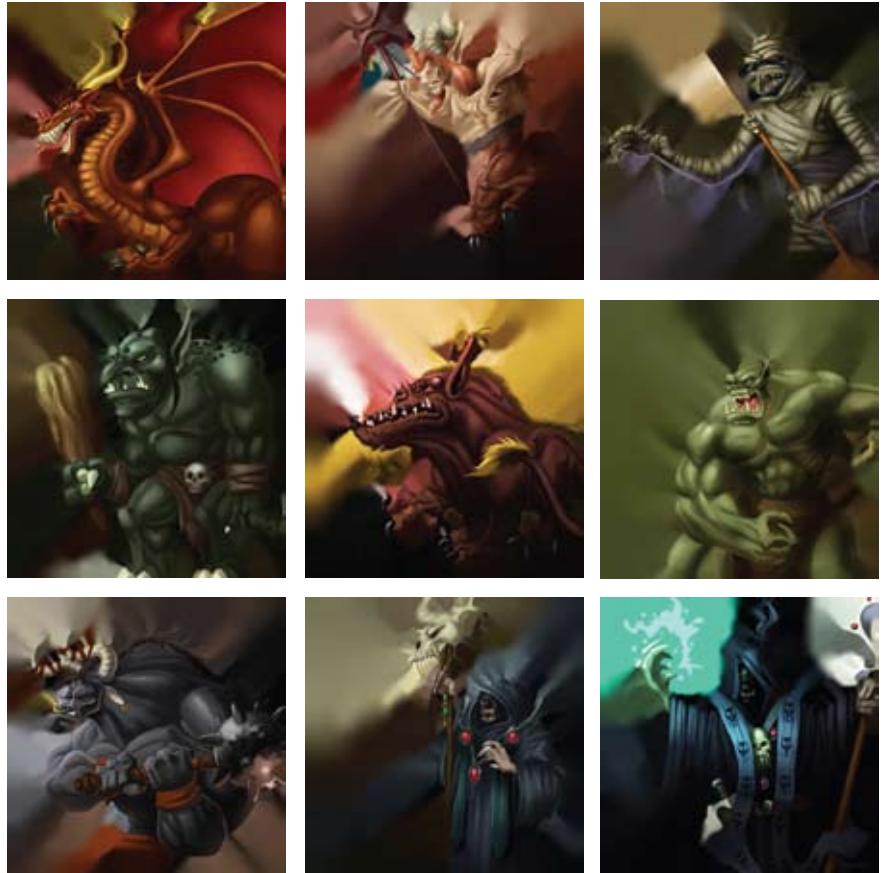
Age: Origins and *Dragon Age 2*, and I read every book found in *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*. But not every player is like me. If the quest texts are too long, most players won't read them; if they are too short, it will seem unimportant. Through some experimenting we landed a quest log with truncated quest explanations—the perfect compromise. Players can skip the long paragraphs of flavor text in favor of the short sentences of the quest log and still know exactly what they need to do.

The quests in this game are simply a vehicle to get the player back to the battle screen, spinning the slot and fighting monsters. We don't have an avatar to maneuver, we don't have 3D graphics to dazzle, and we don't have destructible environments. What we have is an addictive game mechanic that everyone can enjoy. There is something for everyone in *Battle Slots*.

Through beta testing and sharing with friends, we discovered that *Battle Slots* is as fun for children and grandparents as it is for your standard demographics of gamers. *Battle Slots* received some rave reviews, including one from GameShark that gave it the same score as *Portal 2*. We're honored and humbled by the reception it has received and can't wait to expand the audience to millions. ❄

Monetizing Each of Your Games on a Dedicated Website

Taking a Different Approach for Game Monetization

If you are developing casual games, you know that finding the right monetization model can be quite a challenge. Advertisement, in-game virtual goods offers, trial and download are just some of the monetization options, and they may be more or less adapted depending on whether the games are web-based, on mobile, on social networks, and so on. Meanwhile, developers are seeking to optimize the monetization potential of their games by moving outside of their original platforms. At the same time, many are porting their games to "platforms within platforms"—such as game portals or social mobile networks—that distribute games and provide in-game advertisement, social features and other monetization tools.

Games Passport offers one such solution to monetize third-party games. Contrary to traditional game portals, each game on Games Passport has its own dedicated website. This approach keeps the player focused on the game and on its surroundings, where all the proprietary monetization tools are integrated and personalized for each of the games. The platform handles end user registration and activation along with a variety of monetization options, including advertisements, microtransactions, loyalty programs, social features and virtual goods.

How It Works

Games Passport works only with online Flash games. Many of the developers partnering with Games Passport are therefore porting downloadable, mobile or social versions of their games into Flash, thereby gaining access to a new distribution channel. Once the game is plugged in, developers cross-promote their games using banner ads on their Games Passport websites. In addition, a toolbar highlights all of the games present in the Games Passport network, providing further exposure to the 25 million players currently within the network. On average, 200,000 new players are recruited per month, per country and per game.

The registration process for the users is facilitated by an optimized registration form restricted only to the essential information such as user name, email, name, birth date, country and region of residence. Additional information will only be required further along the way.

Monetizing the player starts at this point. Once the user fills out the registration form, a simple, check-box co-registration wall appears to collect opt-in emails from users by asking if they want to receive newsletters from chosen advertisers. Despite the fact that the game does not start immediately after the registration process, the risk of losing the player at this stage is limited, as he is already curious to see "what's next." For that reason, co-registration is especially adapted to this first stage as it

does not require a user to be receptive to advertisements straight away, but rather at a later stage when he starts receiving the actual newsletters. Revenue generated by the co-registration wall ranges between £0,15 and £0,25 and derives from each newsletter to which the user subscribes.

Once a user is a registered member, the first page he sees when logging in is a targeted advertisement based on his profile and historical behavior on the different websites in the network. Not surprisingly, eCPM on these daily deals can reach up to £50!

Alongside these advertisement tools, users have the opportunity to purchase additional credits and virtual goods either through micro-transactions or through the platform's proprietary offer-based payment solution. The important fact about this form of monetization is that it offers a valuable alternative to those reluctant to use a credit card or other payment methods. Even though transaction size is smaller than with classical micro-payments, they account for not less than 65 percent of all transactions carried out on each of the games.

Metrics

Market studies show that most non-MMO casual games attract a slightly larger proportion of female players—around 55 percent of the total database. In the case of Games Passport, this percentage is even higher. For example, women represent 65 percent of those who play *Diamonds Quest* and 75 percent of those who play *Deco*. This higher average is mainly due to a snowball effect, as 65 percent of the recruitment is done by cross-selling amongst the games in the network. Another interesting fact is that females tend to spend more than their male counterparts and account for 77 percent of all spenders. The average age of players using Games Passport turns out to be around 40, and that of the spenders is somewhat lower: 37 years of age.

Around 80 percent of the total members recruited every month become monthly active users for the next four to six months, and as many as 10 percent of them will remain faithful for a full year or two. In order to maintain this steady player database, enhancing the user experience is essential. Games Passport has developed a one-click process for members who want to play other games in the network. So once they have registered for one of the games, they can automatically play all of the other games in the Games Passport network. A tool bar on the top of each of the websites highlights—in the form of apps—all the games currently available, including puzzle games, hidden-object games, physics-based games and time-management games. However, over 60 games are currently in the pipeline and should be available within the next six to nine months.

Another important and unique aspect of Games Passport is that players not only have fun playing the games but also can expect to earn prizes by exchanging the points they earn for gifts. Every month, an average of 30 percent of the revenue generated by each game is redistributed mainly in the form of gift cards, coupled with virtual prizes like badges and virtual

by Konrad Holubek,
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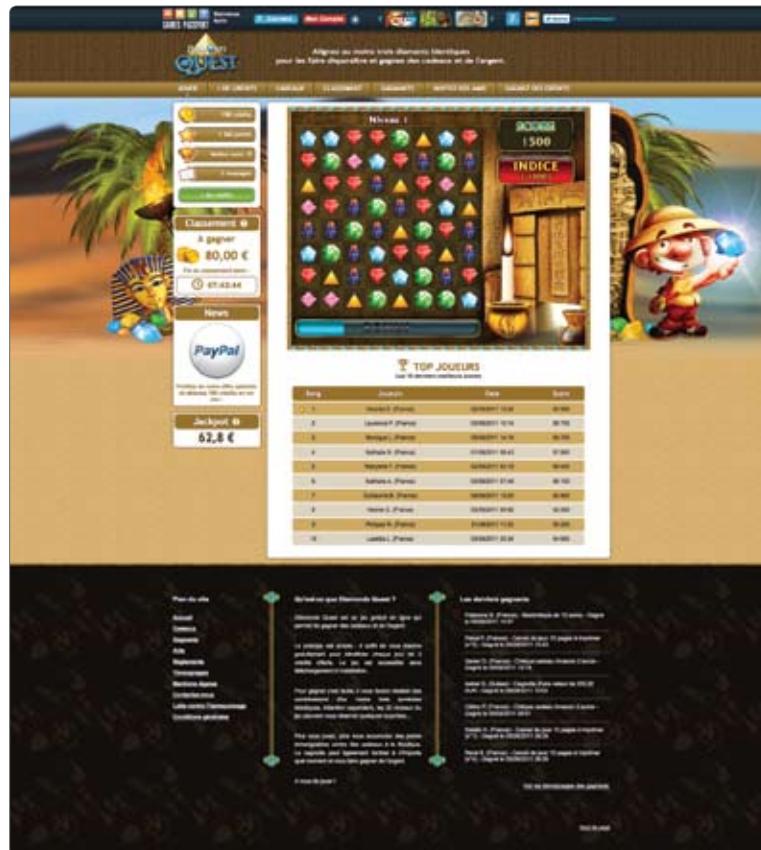
goods. Other loyalty programs include the option for members to play against their friends or to win prizes by reaching the top of the daily leader boards.

Games Passport uses a fine mix of different monetization tools. Focus is not solely on the average eCPM generated by advertisement but depends on the recruitment process, the strategic positioning of the advertisements and on other loyalty programs. This is how the 95 percent of players who never buy additional credits but continue to play for free are monetized. And even though paying players tend to have a higher return on investment, 75 percent of the revenue is still generated by advertisements. The remaining 25 percent comes from players purchasing additional credits through micro-transactions. This share should increase in the near future as more games with in-game purchases become available. Even so, thanks to these various monetization tools, total revenue generated in the month of August this year, in France alone, was £400,000— with only eight games present on the platform at the time. That means there was an average of £50,000 per game per month, with hidden-object games performing the best. ✳

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Now We Are Talking

How we made *Happy Hospital*

The game idea was inspired by a classic from Bullfrog, namely *Theme Hospital* and *Little Computer People*. Mixing it up with cute pets that have funny and harmless diseases was the initial starting idea. The vision was to have your personal little space where you could take care of cute pets.

Sebastian Nuszbaum,
Product Lead
Happy Hospital came directly from our hearts. There are a lot of funny details to discover when treating the pets—details that still make us laugh today. The game's core could be more complex—to allow the player strategic decisions—but then again, our players love the simplicity. I am still smiling when we speak about the sound effects. We built these into the game six months after launching—after receiving tons of mails stating that the sound was broken. (In truth, at that point the specific sounds effects were simply not built in yet.) And I am still surprised that no one has yet found the Easter-egg we built in.

People, who first played the game, said: "Wow, this game looks great—and it's very funny." We put a lot of effort into the pet design, the animation of the characters and the amusing diseases they have. Every pet has its own story, which the players love. This is definitely one of the largest plus-points of the game. We also received a lot of positive feedback because the game is so accessible and easy-to-play.

Daniela Uhlig,
Character Designer
Happy Hospital was the first game for which I created characters. I started sketching with pencil and paper as soon as we realized that we would need a lot of pets for the launch of the game. It took us some weeks until we were happy with the final look. It's a pity that some of the craziest sketches did not make it into the game. *Happy Hospital* is currently the home for 30 pets—and maybe there is one more hidden somewhere.
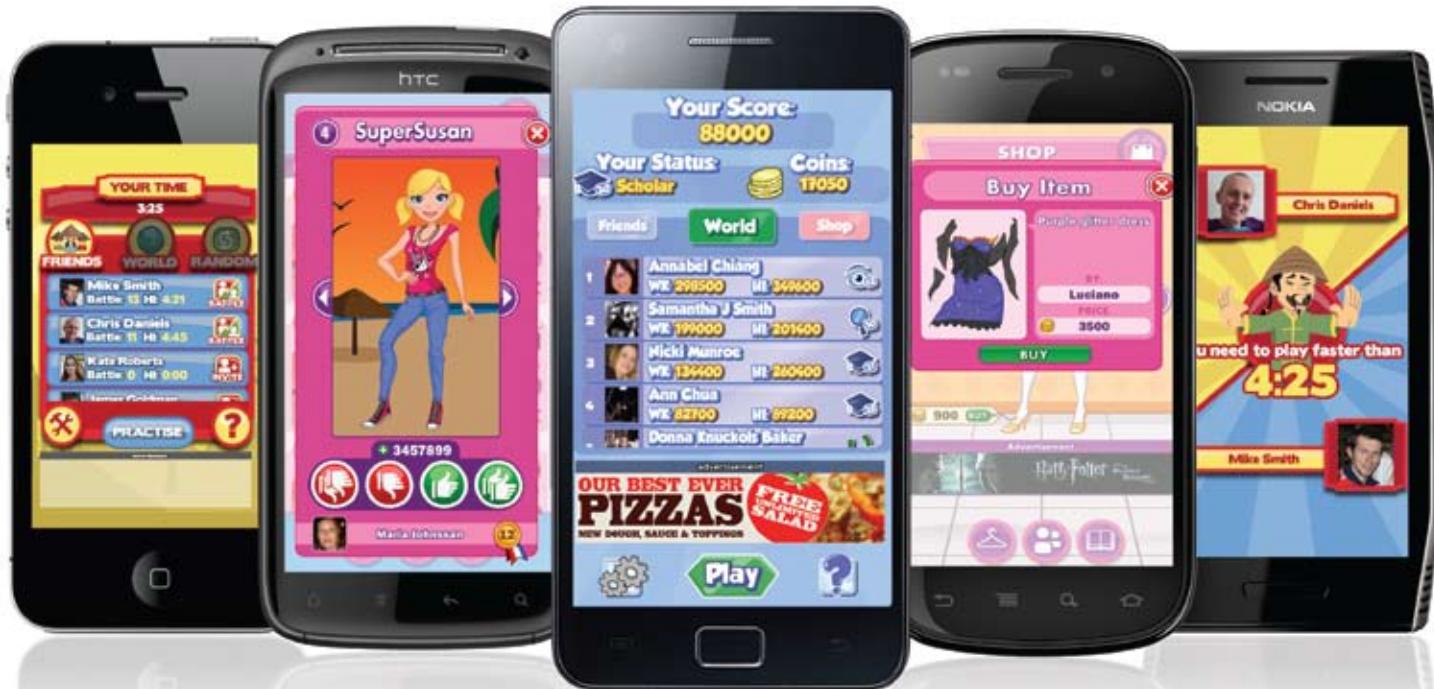
Tim Lossen, *Backend Developer*
Every game development at wooga starts with what we have learned from existing games, but in the end we're free to choose how to build it. I enjoyed this one very much. We chose to use a "Not only SQL database" (NoSQL), which turned out to be very fast and cost-efficient. The whole game team worked very close together, which I liked a lot.

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